ECHOES OF SILENCE

(Autobiographies of non-humans)

By

MUHAMMAD YOUSAF VASEER

SAYYED PUBLICATIONS
URDU BAZAR LAHORE

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Name of book: **Echoes of Silesnce**

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Year: **2025**

Price: **750 PKR**

Publisher: **Sayyed Publishers Urdu Bazar Lahore**

Preface

The human condition has long been chronicled through the subjective lens of the self, yet literature seldom pauses to consider the silent, enduring witnesses to our brief existence. In *Echoes of Silence* (آپ بیتیاں), this volume ventures into an unconventional phenomenological territory, granting an interior life, a voice, and a profound capacity for grief to the inanimate world that surrounds us. Within these pages, the mundane artifacts of daily life—an antique wooden chair, a worn pair of leather shoes, a fading woolen overcoat—are elevated from passive utility to active, melancholic narrators of the human comedy and tragedy.

To write an autobiography of the non-human is to engage in a profound exercise of radical empathy. It requires the writer to strip away human hubris and listen to the quiet resonance of objects that have outlived their masters. These are not mere whimsical fables; rather, they are somber, reflexive elegies steeped in an atmosphere of quiet grief (*gham*). As these silent companions narrate their own lifespans, they inadvertently hold up a mirror to our own vulnerabilities, our fleeting attachments, and our inevitable decay. The overcoat remembers the warmth of a heartbeat it can no longer protect; the chair bears the structural memory of a grief-stricken posture;

the shoes carry the dust of paths walked by feet that have long since vanished.

In synthesis, this work operates at the intersection of existential philosophy and classical literary aesthetics. By utilizing the traditional Urdu genre of *Aap Beeti*—historically reserved for human retrospection—and translating its profound emotional gravity into a modern English literary consciousness, this collection explores themes of abandonment, temporality, and the quiet dignity of the forgotten. It invites the scholarly reader to look beyond the surface of the material world and contemplate a haunting truth: that the objects we possess do not merely serve us; they observe us, mourn us, and ultimately, inherit the earth we leave behind.

— Muhammad Yousaf Vaseer

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Teacup

I lie here, forgotten, among the ruins of yesterday's use—splintered tins, crumpled wrappers, the damp odour of half-rotten fruit skins pressing against me like a suffocating shroud. Once I held warmth, fragrance, and conversation; now I am a fractured vessel, abandoned in the dark belly of a garbage heap. My porcelain skin bears a jagged wound, my handle lost in some careless fall, my once-glossed surface dulled beneath grime.

No hand searches for me anymore. No lips touch my rim in morning reverie, no steam curls upward to dissolve into air as poetry once did in the hush of dawn. I am a relic of silence—mute, discarded, waiting for the slow chemistry of decay. The crows hop about with predatory eyes, the stray dog rummages with disdain, but none

pause to remember that I once gleamed beneath showroom lights, admired like a jewel among common stones.

The sun burns overhead, and yet I feel no warmth. Dust buries me, flies circle with their incessant buzzing, and my identity fades into rubble. I, who once bore the elixir of comfort, am now reduced to a shard, a forgotten metaphor of fragility. In this graveyard of the ignored, I prepare to narrate the story of my existence—a tale carved in earth, fire, and human vanity.

I was not always porcelain, not always shaped to cradle warmth and conversation. My story began as soil, anonymous, trampled beneath the feet of men and beasts alike. I was dust, a speck in the wide tapestry of Punjab's plains, scattered along the edges of a forgotten riverbank. The land around me bore scars of centuries: ploughed for wheat, scarred by floods, cracked in summers so fierce that the very earth groaned in thirst.

I remember the hands that lifted me from my silence. They were not gentle. They belonged to men whose skins were burnt dark by the sun, their backs bent like weary arches under invisible weights. Labourers—children of poverty—who stooped to claw at the earth, their nails blackened, their breath heavy with dust. Their voices

carried no laughter, only the rasping coughs of lungs filled with clay's fine powder. Each handful of soil they gathered was a fragment of their own sweat and blood, pressed into sacks like captured fragments of forgotten lives.

I was heaped into a cart, jolted along dirt tracks where thorn bushes scratched at the wheels. The oxen trudged slowly, ribs visible, eyes dull with fatigue. The village receded behind me—a cluster of mud houses, smoke rising from cow-dung fires, children half-naked chasing a hoop of rusted tin. Their mothers called them in tired voices, while their fathers stood idle, dreaming of wages that were always too little.

The road stretched endlessly, pitted with stones, crossing landscapes of contradiction: mustard fields glowing gold beneath a sky grey with dust; barren patches where only thorn and sorrow survived. At night, the cart stopped under trees, where labourers chewed stale roti and drank brackish water, speaking of debts that grew like weeds, of landowners who cared little for the earth or those who tilled it. I, a silent fragment of clay, listened and absorbed their despair.

At last, I reached the city—a loud, fevered organism. The air here was different: filled with smoke, shouts, metallic

clangs, and the stench of sweat and industry. I was unloaded with indifference, cast among mounds of other soil, each lump carrying the memory of a distant field, each clod once a home to insects, seeds, and roots. Now we were raw material—life stripped of its natural dignity, reduced to commodity.

The factory loomed before us, an iron beast, breathing fire and belching black smoke into the sky. Men worked there too, but their eyes were hollow, dulled by repetition, their hands quick and mechanical. They were captives of the furnace, slaves of the wheel, their humanity ground as fine as the dust they inhaled. I felt their exhaustion, their hopelessness, as surely as I felt the jolts of the grinding stones that would soon crush me into finer particles.

Here, my transformation would begin. Yet, in those early moments at the factory's threshold, I mourned my loss. I was no longer soil belonging to the sky, to rain, to root and worm. I was clay destined for use, measured in weight, price, and utility. The labourers' eyes reflected my fate—they too were taken from their villages, stripped of freedom, remoulded into cogs of an unforgiving system.

Thus began my journey from the anonymity of dust to the fragile dignity of form.

The factory doors opened not like the gates of creation, but like the jaws of a monster hungry for form, eager to devour the formless. Inside, I—mere soil—was stripped of my silence and thrown into the mill of transformation.

First came the **crushing, merciless and absolute. Heavy stones ground me into fragments finer than memory itself. I, who once held the fragrance of earth after rain, was reduced to dust without identity. The grinding wheel roared like a blind giant, its metal teeth gnashing with no compassion. Around me, other clods of soil screamed in their own voiceless way, crushed into sameness. I thought of the labourers whose lives, too, were ground down by debt and poverty—different in face, but identical in fate. The wheel did not discriminate: whether soft soil or hardened lump, all were destined to dissolve into fine particles.**

Next came the **washing and mixing. Water was poured over me, not the gentle rain of fields, but harsh streams that forced me into slurry. My texture shifted from dry to damp, pliable yet suffocated. I was kneaded and stirred, stripped of individuality until I became part of a larger mass. In this drowning, I felt the echo of human societies: how individuals are often washed into**

conformity, identities blurred, until they are merely part of a collective body shaped by unseen hands.

Then, in vats of iron, I was churned into **clay—smooth, sticky, obedient. The labourers pressed me with their calloused palms, pushing and folding, as though I were dough for bread. Each strike of their hands carried exhaustion, their fingernails bitten by poverty, their breath laced with fatigue. Yet, through their labour, I felt a strange intimacy. They gave me not tenderness, but effort—the same effort they gave their families, their futures, their prayers whispered in exhaustion.**

After kneading came **moulding. I was pressed into a cast, my shape predetermined, my destiny decided before I could protest. Cold plaster embraced me, not as a mother but as a tyrant, dictating the curve of my lip, the arc of my handle, the roundness of my belly. I wondered: is this not how men and women too are shaped? Born as raw clay, yet pressed into forms chosen by society, culture, and family, until they become vessels not of their choosing but of expectation.**

When the mould released me, I trembled with new identity. For the first time, I resembled something recognizable—a teacup. Yet I was fragile, moist, and temporary. I needed **drying. Days passed in air thick**

with dust and smoke, as I hardened under the watch of labourers whose own lives were parched of softness. They stacked me on wooden planks, row after row, silent army of fragile forms awaiting judgment. Around me lay whispers of destiny: some cups would crack before their first use; others would gleam upon royal tables. We were equal in clay but unequal in fate.

Then came the **glazing—a baptism of colour. I was dipped in liquid that felt both cold and promising, my surface coated in sheen that whispered of beauty and dignity. The glaze clung to me like borrowed robes, concealing my humble origin, promising me a place among the elegant. I thought of humans again, how they too glaze themselves—with clothing, with manners, with wealth—to disguise the cracks of their existence. Beauty, I realised, was often not truth, but artifice.**

But no glaze could prepare me for the **furnace. Ah, the fire! It was no ordinary flame, but a roaring inferno where clay met its trial by ordeal. I was placed upon a tray, slid into the furnace's blazing throat. The heat was unbearable, pressing into my very pores, searing me until I screamed without sound. Around me, other cups too shrieked in their silence, our forms tested in flames that could either perfect or destroy us. I thought of prophets**

and saints, tested by fires of tribulation; I thought of workers, their lives consumed by relentless toil; I thought of humanity itself, always tempered in suffering before it achieved endurance.

Within that furnace, time dissolved. Seconds were eternities; minutes, centuries. I felt myself harden, my clay transforming into porcelain, my fragility reforged into durability. Pain sculpted strength, suffering birthed resilience. At last, the furnace exhaled and the labourers pulled us from its mouth—each of us altered, each of us survivors of the fire.

I cooled slowly, my new self gleaming faintly beneath the glaze. When I caught my reflection upon a polished surface, I was startled. I was beautiful—curved elegantly, smooth to the touch, white as a fragment of moonlight. Who would believe that I was once mud trodden underfoot, dust scattered on fields? Such was the alchemy of labour and suffering: the lowliest earth remade into an object of desire.

Yet even in this beauty, I felt sorrow. For I knew my elegance was not my own—it was shaped by hands that never tasted the tea I would hold, forged in flames that burnt the poor but glorified the rich. My existence was a

paradox: dignity born of exploitation, splendour birthed by sweat.

When I was placed among others in a showroom, I sat upon glass shelves under fluorescent lights, admired like a jewel. Customers came and went, their eyes lingering, their fingers brushing against us as though choosing brides. I was priced, tagged, commodified. No one saw the history beneath my glaze, the labourers' cracked hands, the furnace's roar. To them, I was but a beautiful teacup—delicate, desirable, dispensable.

Thus, my making was complete—not just the shaping of clay, but the shaping of destiny. I was no longer soil, nor mere vessel. I was a silent witness, a metaphor in porcelain, carrying within me the story of earth, of fire, of human toil. My journey through crushing, kneading, moulding, glazing, and fire was not just a passage of transformation, but an allegory of existence itself.

I, the teacup, had been born.

If the furnace had been my purgatory, the showroom was my paradise—or so it seemed at first glance. I was placed on a glass shelf beneath fluorescent lights that mimicked the radiance of a captive sun. Around me stood my kin: saucers like miniature moons, plates broad as polished

shields, bowls with mouths open as if in constant astonishment. Together we formed an army of splendour, frozen in elegance, silently competing for human desire.

There, my glaze caught light like a secret. I gleamed, flawless, my porcelain skin white as a newborn star, my rim curving in graceful symmetry. I felt a dignity I had never known before, a dignity not of soil nor sweat but of sheer appearance. Men and women came, their eyes grazing me like connoisseurs surveying art. I was judged not for the fields that had birthed me, nor the labourers who had moulded me, but for the sheen of my surface and the curve of my form.

I began to understand how beauty, in human society, often stands divorced from history. The hands that polished me were invisible; the furnace's roar inaudible. Customers spoke in soft tones of elegance, of refinement, of taste. To them I was not clay and sweat, but luxury incarnate.

Then she came—the officer's wife. Draped in silken attire dyed in the hue of peacocks, her bangles chiming as she moved, she carried herself with the air of one accustomed to command. Her eyes swept across the shelves, dismissing many with a mere glance, until they paused on me. She lifted me gently, turning me in her manicured

fingers as though I were a diamond plucked from earth's veins.

"A fine cup," she said in Urdu laced with English affectation, her tone carrying the satisfaction of conquest. "Perfect for guests of importance."

Thus I was purchased, exchanged for rupees that bore no relation to the sweat that had shaped me. Wrapped in paper, cushioned against fracture, I left the showroom—proud, anxious, uncertain—destined for a home where my role would be both exalted and diminished.

The officer's house was no ordinary dwelling. It stood in a cantonment street lined with trees trimmed like soldiers on parade. Whitewashed walls rose tall and imposing, iron gates gleamed with fresh paint, and a guard saluted as cars drove in and out. Inside, chandeliers spilled false stars upon marble floors, and furniture imported from abroad stood like monuments to wealth. Every object seemed to whisper not of necessity, but of pride.

Here, I was placed among others in a glass cabinet, displayed behind transparent doors as though I were both treasure and prisoner. Around me rested crystal glasses that sparkled like captured rainbows, silver spoons polished until they reflected faces like mocking mirrors,

plates from Japan with delicate blue patterns of waves and cranes. In such company I should have felt honoured, yet a strange unease filled me. We were not companions but rivals, each object vying for recognition in a household where status reigned supreme.

Soon enough, I was summoned for duty. The officer's wife, entertaining a group of ladies adorned with perfumes and heavy jewellery, placed me on a tray. I carried steaming tea—dark, sweetened excessively, perfumed with cardamom—into the drawing room. As I was lifted and sipped from, I heard their conversations: gossip of servants, boasts of shopping trips abroad, laughter at the misfortunes of others. Their voices tinkled like glass, brittle, hollow.

The officer himself was a man of bulk and bearing. His moustache bristled like a badge of authority; his uniform gleamed though his conscience did not. He had built his empire not through merit, but through bribes: contracts secured with whispered promises, wealth accumulated at the expense of honesty. He walked heavily through his house, his words clipped, his children scattering like sparrows before him.

His wife basked in his ill-gotten wealth, adorning herself in silks and pearls, her pride swelling with each imported

item she added to her home. Their children, however, were creatures of chaos. The boys shouted and fought, their English broken, their manners rough, their arrogance larger than their learning. They kicked balls into polished furniture, tore pages from books, and treated servants as though they were lower than insects. Their laughter was sharp, their tantrums louder than thunder, and their entitlement filled the house like smoke suffocating every corner.

And yet, here I was, a cup of elegance, cradled in their careless hands. They slurped tea from me without reverence, dribbled sugar upon my saucer, knocked me against spoons and plates. My dignity, so carefully constructed in showroom light, trembled under their indifference. I was beauty trapped in vulgarity, refinement imprisoned in excess.

Still, I endured. I served guest after guest, a silent witness to lies and boasts, to deals struck in whispers, to laughter that concealed cruelty. The officer boasted of his connections; his wife paraded her jewellery; their children interrupted with demands for more toys, more sweets, more indulgence. And I, the cup, carried the warmth of tea into their mouths, though my own existence grew colder with each passing day.

I began to realise the paradox of my fate: I had been elevated in status, placed in a home of wealth and display, yet stripped of meaning. My beauty was wasted in a household that could not see beauty, only ownership. I was not appreciated as craft, but as possession—a pawn in the larger theatre of pride.

Sometimes, late at night, when the house grew silent and the servants cleared away the day's debris, I conversed silently with the other cups and plates in the cabinet. We shared our sorrows, our disillusionments. A crystal goblet whispered that it once belonged to a colonial officer's table; a silver spoon sighed that it had never tasted the hunger of the poor. Together we mourned the futility of our splendour, the emptiness of our role in households where wealth overshadowed wonder.

Yet, even in this gilded cage, I sensed the inevitability of decline. For beauty, however admired, is always fragile. A cup, however precious, lives always on the brink of fracture. And so, though I gleamed under lights and touched the lips of the powerful, I knew my destiny lay not in eternal preservation, but in the careless hands of children, in the clumsy accident that would strip me of dignity and thrust me back into the dust from which I came.

And indeed, that moment was approaching—though I did not yet know it.

It was a trivial accident, as most great calamities are. A child's careless hand, impatient for play, brushed against me on the drawing-room table. I toppled with a muted thud, a fall cushioned by the carpet. No shattering, no dramatic cry of porcelain—only a faint blemish upon my rim, a whisper of imperfection invisible to the hurried glance. Yet that slight, hidden wound was enough to seal my fate.

The officer's wife noticed the flaw with hawk-like precision. She turned me in her fingers, pursed her lips, and declared, *"It is no longer fit for guests."* My dignity, once paraded before ladies and gentlemen, was demoted in a sentence. I was cast aside—not broken, but demoted, exiled from the glass cabinet into a cupboard where cracked plates and chipped bowls dwelled in silent shame.

But my story did not end in darkness. Soon after, I was taken from that cupboard and placed in the hands of another—a man who arrived daily to teach the officer's children arithmetic, Urdu, and fragments of English grammar. He was their tutor, a figure of quiet dignity wrapped in faded clothes. His spectacles were old, his

shoes worn thin, his bag a relic of years of struggle. His payment was meagre; his treatment by the children often cruel. Yet, when the officer's wife handed me to him with a dismissive wave—"Take this, it is useless here"—his eyes shone with gratitude, as though he had been given a treasure.

Thus I was carried to a new dwelling. The officer's mansion receded, and I entered a world stripped of chandeliers and marble. The tutor's home stood in a narrow street, its walls stained with dampness, its roof patched with tin sheets. The rooms were few, the furniture sparse, the air thick with the smell of kerosene and lentils boiling on a small stove. Here there were no servants, no imported luxuries—only the raw texture of life lived in honesty.

On a wooden shelf beside tin cups and mismatched plates, I took my new place. To my surprise, I was treated not with disdain but with reverence. Each evening the tutor washed me carefully, drying me with a cloth so worn it was almost transparent. He drank his tea from me slowly, savouring each sip as though it were wealth itself. In his hands, I regained a kind of dignity—not the shallow dignity of display, but the quiet respect of necessity.

I began to observe the rhythms of his household. His wife worked tirelessly, mending clothes, cooking with ingenuity from meagre supplies, soothing quarrels among the children. She wore no jewellery but the lines of patience upon her face. The children, three in number, carried books with frayed edges and pencils sharpened to nubs. They studied by the dim light of a single bulb, often grumbling that their father's profession had brought them nothing but poverty.

They looked upon him not with admiration, but with disappointment. "Why can't you become an officer like the others?" one son demanded. "Why must we always wear second-hand uniforms? Why do we live in this crumbling house?" Their words pierced deeper than any furnace's flame. The tutor listened in silence, adjusting his spectacles, stroking his beard, whispering only: *"Honesty is its own reward, my children."*

Yet honesty, though noble, did not fill their stomachs with abundance nor their minds with satisfaction. The children longed for the marble floors, the chandeliers, the toys and sweets they glimpsed in wealthier homes. Their eyes were restless, their hearts ungrateful. In their discontent, I saw a reflection of my own fate: once admired in splendour,

now relegated to a humbler existence, though still intact in spirit.

But time spares nothing—not even porcelain, not even patience. One evening, in the dim light, a quarrel erupted among the children. A careless hand struck the table, and I fell once more. This time there was no carpet to soften my descent. I hit the cement floor with a sharp cry. My handle snapped, clattering beside me like a severed limb.

The room fell silent. The tutor lifted me gently, his eyes filled with sorrow. For days he still used me, gripping my cracked body carefully, refusing to cast me away. Yet a cup without a handle is a crippled companion. Eventually, with resignation heavy as stone, he carried me outside and placed me among the rubbish—peelings, ashes, broken things.

And so here I lie again, in the garbage heap where my tale began. But I am no longer the same. I have lived the full cycle of creation, splendour, decline, and oblivion. I have known the furnace and the showroom, the officer's wealth and the tutor's poverty. I have tasted both vanity and necessity, pride and humility.

What, then, is the meaning of my journey? Am I merely clay shaped for utility, discarded when marred? Or am I

a mirror of humanity itself—born of earth, hardened by suffering, exalted by beauty, yet destined always for decline?

The flies buzz above me, the stray dog noses through the refuse, and still I ponder. I recall the officer's children, raised in arrogance, and the tutor's children, raised in hunger yet longing for pride. I recall the labourers who dug me from soil, whose sweat was baked invisibly into my form, yet who would never hold me in their hands. I recall the furnace's roar, the showroom's light, the officer's laughter, the tutor's sigh. All these live within me, etched in porcelain memory.

I am broken, yes. My handle lies somewhere in the dust. My glaze is dulled, my dignity stained. Yet in this brokenness, I have become whole in understanding. I see now that every object, every human, carries the same arc: from soil to splendour, from splendour to fracture, from fracture to earth again.

Perhaps one day, rains will wash over this garbage heap, dissolving me back into soil. Perhaps a child will play with my shards, imagining kingdoms among ruins. Or perhaps I will lie forgotten, a relic of fragility in a world that worships strength. But whatever my fate, I remain a witness.

Over coat

I lie discarded, a crumpled shadow of my former self, on the margins of a garbage heap where plastic bags flutter like tattered flags of defeat and stray dogs scavenge in silent wars over scraps. My once-majestic fabric, proud in its dignity and warmth, has grown thin and threadbare, eaten by moths and indifference alike. Once I embraced shoulders against the cold winds of December, now I am myself shivering in neglect, rain-soaked and dust-stained, abandoned by those who once prized me.

The stench of decay envelops me, mingling with the acrid smoke of burning refuse and the sour breath of rotting fruit. Children dart past with curious eyes, prodding me

with sticks as though I were a carcass, not a garment that once commanded admiration. The wind tugs at my torn sleeve, and I feel as though the very air mocks my fragility.

I, who once hung in the light of showrooms, admired as a garment of distinction, reduced now to nothing more than rags fit for scavengers. My buttons are missing, my lining torn; I no longer hold the warmth of dignity, only the chill of abandonment.

Yet within these frayed threads lives a story—a tale that stretches from the back of a grazing sheep to this unceremonious grave. Though my body is ruined, my memory remains intact, and in this heap of oblivion I find my voice at last.

Before I was thread, before I was cloth, before I was draped upon a man's shoulders as dignity against the cold, I was nothing more than wool upon the back of a creature who grazed in silence upon the desolate uplands of Baluchistan. The wind there is merciless, carrying dust like ancestral curses, sweeping across barren ridges where tufts of grass struggle like prophets in exile.

The sheep, my first home, bore me without choice. Its body, a trembling mass of flesh and bone, clothed itself in

me as a shield against the gnawing cold. Together, the herd wandered, driven by a shepherd whose own life was no less ragged. His turban was frayed, his staff cracked, and his eyes hollow with the emptiness that poverty chisels into human souls. He walked not merely on soil but on centuries of deprivation, his footprints echoing the endless tale of the peasant—forever feeding others yet himself starved of comfort.

At dawn, when the mountains blushed under hesitant sunlight, he would drive the sheep to graze on thorny patches. The animals, patient and dumb, chewed eternity into fragments, their bleating weaving a chorus of survival. Their wool—my womb—grew thicker each season, absorbing dust, wind, and the smell of earth. I was not yet aware of my destiny, but already I was marked, a fibre destined for transformation, a future servant of warmth and vanity alike.

Then came the shearing. Ah, the brutal intimacy of blades! Cold steel kissed my body, tearing me from the skin that birthed me. The sheep shivered, eyes wide with mute protest, yet it submitted, as generations had done before. The shepherd gathered us—mounds of wool, like clouds pulled rudely from the sky—and heaped us into

bundles. There we lay, lifeless yet brimming with unspent purpose.

The shepherd's wife helped him tie the heaps with coarse rope. Her fingers, cracked and hardened by labour, moved with mechanical obedience. No poetry softened her hands; life had written upon them its prose of necessity. Children watched silently, their bellies hollow, their futures already clipped shorter than the wool itself. In those heaps, I sensed not merely my own dislocation but the wider truth: we were commodities in a world where both sheep and shepherd, both wool and child, existed only as fodder for markets far beyond their reach.

Days later, loaded upon a lorry that groaned like an old beast, we were carried from the loneliness of mountains into the chaos of the plains. Dust rose behind us like a ghostly procession. Villages passed by—mud huts, barefoot children, men squatting in thoughtless fatigue. None looked at us with wonder. We were nothing more than wool, raw matter destined to be shaped by hands we did not yet know.

At last, the spinning factory loomed. Its tall chimney vomited black smoke into the sky, a declaration of man's conquest over nature, or perhaps of his indifference to beauty. The gates swallowed us, and the shepherd was

paid—a pittance, barely enough to buy a month of flour. He counted the notes slowly, as though they were ashes slipping through his fingers. His eyes betrayed no joy, for he knew the cycle would repeat: his sheep would grow wool again, he would shear again, and he would be paid again the price of survival, never of dignity.

Thus, I was surrendered to the belly of industry. Torn from sheep, stripped from mountain air, I now lay in heaps within the factory's belly, awaiting the whirring jaws of machines that would grind me into thread. I, who once danced in the wind upon the back of a humble beast, was about to begin my metamorphosis into something more than fibre—into fabric, into garment, into symbol.

And yet, even here, I could sense the paradox: though my destiny was to adorn men of power, I was born from the misery of shepherds who would never know the warmth of what their labour created.

When I left the hands of the shepherd, bundled and shorn, I thought my identity was lost. No longer part of the breathing creature that had carried me upon his back, I was reduced to mere tufts of wool, a lifeless heap awaiting its fate. Yet destiny, like a stern sculptor, does not carve without purpose.

I was hurled into the cavernous belly of the spinning factory — a place where machines roared like imprisoned beasts and men toiled like shadows chained to time. The air was heavy with the musk of grease, dust, and sweat; a cacophony of metal struck against the silence of human bones bent in labour. The labourers here were not unlike the sheep: shorn of dignity, fenced in by necessity, their days consumed by endless repetition.

I recall the first crushing. Iron teeth gnashed me, pulled me apart, shredded my fibres until I no longer resembled myself. How mercilessly identity dissolves when cast into the machinery of industry! My soft strands, once swayed by mountain winds, were now beaten into submission. And yet, in this breaking, a strange rebirth occurred — for out of the chaos of my fibres, threads began to emerge. Each strand stretched thin, drawn taut, like human souls stretched by poverty but resilient enough to endure.

Then came the spinning: wheels turned with a ceaseless monotony, whirling me into lines of purpose, just as history whirls men into narratives they never chose. The threads entwined with one another, finding strength not in solitude but in union. How telling it is — a single fibre is fragile, breakable with the slightest tug, but together,

woven with others, it gains endurance, a lesson humanity itself forgets in its fever for individual glory.

From spinning I was carried into the looms. There, I became fabric. The shuttle darted like a swift messenger of fate, crisscrossing the warp and weft, binding me into form. The clatter of the loom was not unlike the rhythm of a heart — constant, insistent, declaring life. I was now a sheet of cloth, broad and proud, still raw but undeniably whole.

Yet no journey is complete without fire. Into the vats I went, bathed in dye, plunged into colours that bled like poetry into my very veins. I emerged in a deep shade of sombre grey, a hue befitting dignity and restraint. No gaudy brightness for me — my destiny was to embody quiet elegance, the grace that whispers rather than shouts.

After the dye, I was pressed, rolled, folded — disciplined into refinement. Each fold seemed a rehearsal for the bows and curtsies I would later perform on the stage of society.

Then came the stitching factory — the theatre where identity was finally given shape. Here, tailors laboured with eyes weary yet hands deft, their needles moving like

poets' pens, each puncture a word, each seam a sentence. I was cut into pieces, as though dismembered, but paradoxically, this dissection was necessary for wholeness. Like a philosopher dismantling existence only to rebuild meaning, the tailor cut me apart in order to fashion me into something greater.

Sleeves were born, destined to embrace human arms. A collar was raised, proud yet protective, encircling the neck with both authority and warmth. Buttons were sewn like tiny sentinels, guardians of order against the chaos of wind and cold. Pockets were stitched, little sanctuaries where secrets, coins, and trembling hands would one day reside.

And slowly, piece by piece, stitch by stitch, I was resurrected — no longer wool, no longer thread, no longer fabric, but an **Overcoat. My destiny was tailored into me with every movement of the craftsman's hand. I bore upon me not merely stitches of thread but the weight of human ambition, of dreams for dignity, of a silent promise to shield against the storms.**

I remember the first moment I was lifted from the tailor's bench, completed, hanging proud on a simple wooden hanger. There was a hush within me, the stillness of an untested soldier awaiting battle, a virgin pen waiting to

ink history. I was immaculate, my seams straight, my buttons gleaming, my fabric smooth as silence.

Yet as I hung there, I could not help but reflect: how strange this transformation! From the back of a sheep wandering forgotten hills, I had journeyed through blades, dyes, machines, and fire, only to be made into a garment that men would prize, flaunt, and covet. Did not the sheep's humble life, the shepherd's cracked hands, the labourer's bent spine, and the tailor's weary gaze remain woven within me? I was not just cloth — I was a tapestry of lives, each thread echoing a sigh, a sweat, a sacrifice.

At last, I was wrapped in tissue paper, folded reverently, and placed inside a box. The box itself seemed like a coffin, but I knew it was a cradle — for I was destined to emerge again in light, this time not as raw wool nor as fabric, but as an emblem of status and warmth.

And so I travelled, boxed and silent, into the luminous chambers of a showroom, where glass reflected my form and lights cast their flattering glow upon my surface. I was no longer a remnant of the mountains; I was now an artefact of civilisation, awaiting the hand that would claim me.

Those were days of regal splendour. How the showroom sparkled! Glass shelves and polished counters reflected our sheen. Perfumed air swam through the room, carrying notes of cedarwood and citrus, as if to intoxicate the very notion of elegance. Customers walked in with inspecting eyes, fingers brushing fabrics as if reading secret scriptures woven into our threads. Some admired me, some passed me by, but I stood unwavering, convinced that my fate was not to be forgotten in the corner of a rack.

Then came the woman who was destined to choose me. Draped in a modest shawl, her gait quiet yet composed, she bore not the airs of extravagance but the serenity of cultivated grace. She was the wife of a politician—though not the sort whose very name is synonymous with greed and deceit, but one whose hands were still clean with the dust of service, whose heart beat with the earnest rhythm of loyalty to his people. She did not haggle, did not rush. Her eyes settled on me with the stillness of a prayer.

“This one,” she said gently, her fingers gliding across my sleeve with the tenderness of a mother brushing the hair from her child’s face. And thus my new chapter began.

I was carried to their home, and oh! what a home it was. Not ostentatious like the palaces of the corrupt, not drenched in marble and gold, but breathing in honesty and simplicity. The drawing room bore bookshelves instead of chandeliers, the air was filled with the scent of ink and paper, not stale perfumes of vanity. The children—two boys and a girl—were taught not to shout but to listen, not to boast but to share. Their laughter was soft, their manners gentle, and when they looked at me as I was hung upon the rack, it was with admiration unmarred by arrogance.

The politician himself—my master—was a man of rare stature. His footsteps were steady, his speech calm, his smile sincere. When he wore me upon his shoulders for the first time, I felt elevated, not by his rank, but by his humility. He carried me into parliament halls where voices clashed like swords, yet his own words flowed like healing balm, advocating schools for the poor, medicine for the sick, fairness for the farmer. In those cold mornings when he would rise before dawn to meet workers on the roadside, I was wrapped around him like a shield, and I carried upon my fabric the warmth of his unpretentious heart.

The newspapers sometimes captured his image—*a man in a plain overcoat, standing among his people*. And there I was, my fabric immortalised in black and white, a silent witness to his honesty. My pride was not that I was worn by a politician, but that I adorned a man whose soul was not sold to power.

In the quiet of the evenings, the family gathered in their modest drawing room. The children recited poetry—Iqbal's verses of selfhood and faith, Ghalib's sighs of longing—while their father listened with folded hands. The mother sewed in silence, her face aglow with contentment. Sometimes they spoke of the burdens of public life, of sleepless nights spent trying to balance promises and realities, yet never did despair corrode their spirit. I hung quietly nearby, yet I felt as though I were part of their household prayer, part of their breath, part of their ideals.

I was never flaunted at gaudy banquets, never dragged through smoke-filled gambling dens, never humiliated by drunken laughter. Instead, I was worn in parliaments, at schools, in public rallies, in homes where the poor were fed. My fabric absorbed speeches of hope, whispers of sacrifice, sighs of exhaustion—and in this way, I too became a vessel of meaning.

And yet, pride is a fragile blossom. Even as I shone in those days, a small voice in my seams whispered of impermanence. I knew that cloth frays, that fashion is fleeting, that time spares no fibre. But I hushed those thoughts, for I was still at the height of my dignity, clothed upon a man who gave me worth beyond silk and thread.

If Plato were right, that objects carry shadows of eternal forms, then I believe in those days I embodied the Idea of Clothing itself—not vanity, not excess, but protection and honour. And if Shakespeare was right, that "all the world's a stage, and men merely players," then I was the costume of a noble character, whose role was not to deceive but to serve.

Those were my golden days—the zenith of my existence. To be chosen by humility, to be worn by sincerity, to rest in a home of civility. What more could an overcoat ask for?

But even the most golden dawns fade into dusk. And so, unbeknownst to me, my next journey was already being written in the quiet corners of time.

I had scarcely tasted the dignified fragrance of politics, scarcely revelled in the decency of cultured children and

the humble laughter of a true statesman's hearth, when my fortune altered once more. Such is the story of garments, and perhaps of mankind itself: no position is permanent, no station eternal. The wheel of necessity spins, and we are tossed like dice upon the board of fate.

One afternoon, after a long winter of faithful service, I was lifted gently from the polished wooden stand in the politician's vestibule. His wife folded me with the same careful hands that once selected me from the glass-lit showroom. I knew, by the delicacy of her gesture, that I was not being discarded in contempt but transferred in quiet kindness. Soon I was handed over to the gardener, a man of earthy simplicity, whose palms bore the lines of furrows, whose nails were stained with the stubborn soil of Lahore.

He received me as if I were a treasure. His eyes glistened with the gratitude of one who receives not mere cloth, but dignity stitched into fabric. To him, I was not a faded overcoat nearing the twilight of my years; I was warmth against winter's cruelty, a shield against the biting wind that sweeps mercilessly across Punjab's plains.

Yet he did not keep me for himself. His heart, rich in love though poor in coin, turned instinctively towards his son. "He is in college," the gardener whispered to his wife,

“and his nights are long with books. This will keep him warm. Let him wear what once belonged to nobility—it may inspire him.”

Thus I found myself draped across the shoulders of a young man—his back still straight, his eyes alight with ambition. He was not wealthy, nor wrapped in privileges like those with whom I had once adorned political gatherings, but within him resided a nobility greater than lineage: the burning resolve to become a doctor. He longed not for riches but for the power to heal, to mend what fate or poverty had broken in human flesh.

I accompanied him through countless evenings, as he bent over worn textbooks beneath the faint glow of a single bulb. The room was bare: a narrow cot, a wooden desk, a shelf of second-hand volumes, and in the corner, myself—folded, refolded, worn, then worn again. His breath carried the scent of cheap tea, his eyes bore the exhaustion of endless study, yet in the stillness of midnight I often heard him whisper fragments of hope—dreams of serving humanity, of opening a small clinic in his village, of becoming the balm for the wounds of the forgotten.

I had once been applauded for my sheen, my buttons, my cut. Now I was honoured for a different reason:

endurance. Though my lining had begun to fray and my stitches slackened, I remained loyal, shielding him through foggy dawns as he bicycled to college, wrapping him in bitterly cold exam halls where windows rattled against December winds. In his gratitude, I discovered my truest beauty.

Two winters passed in this way. The boy succeeded; he completed his studies with distinction. I had grown weary now, bearing the creases of struggle, stained faintly by rain and dust, dulled by overuse. Where once I had been regal, I was now merely serviceable. But I was proud. Proud that my fabric had borne the weight of dreams.

It was then, however, that the circle of fate tightened yet again. The young man, soon to enter medical school, stood taller, dressed in newer garments that befitted his rising station. I, old companion of his striving days, was folded once more and carried away. Not with disdain, but with the pragmatic detachment of progress. What had served him in need was to serve another still.

And so, one chilly evening, I was placed upon the shoulders of a beggar. My transition, though natural, was abrupt. I had been in the house of a politician, then the dwelling of a humble gardener, then the chamber of a student. Now I was flung into the shifting fraternity of the

dispossessed. The beggar who wore me was aged, his beard unkempt, his eyes dull with hunger. Yet when he pulled me around his shivering frame, he exhaled a sigh of relief so deep that it seemed to rise from the depths of centuries of deprivation.

His gratitude was silent but palpable. For him I was not a symbol of ambition, nor of prestige—I was survival. My holes mattered little, my faded shade mattered less. In his hut of tin and tarpaulin, I became a wall against the night, a poor substitute for blankets he could not afford. I was dragged to the roadside where he begged; I was laid beneath him when he slept upon concrete; I was lifted in trembling hands like a makeshift shield when the rains lashed against his fragile shelter.

Among the community of beggars, I came to know a world seldom described in polished books or parliament speeches. Their psychology was complex—a mixture of resignation and cunning, despair and strange merriment. They lived in shifting clusters, like flocks of migratory birds without wings. They shared scraps of bread, squabbled over territories at traffic signals, told each other tales of the lives they once had—farmers, labourers, women widowed too young, children orphaned too soon.

I, who had once adorned a statesman's frame, now absorbed the smell of unwashed skin, the grit of pavements, the sighs of empty stomachs. Yet I did not complain. Perhaps this was the most profound chapter of my existence: to touch the bottom rung of society, to feel the raw wound of poverty.

Years passed thus, and I weakened. My fabric thinned, my seams broke open like tired lips that could no longer speak. The beggar patched me with rags, tied me with string, but eventually even his resourceful hands gave up. I was cast aside, tossed upon a heap of refuse where torn shoes, broken pots, and forgotten toys lay in mute companionship.

Here, amidst the flies and the stench, I now lie—telling my story to whosoever would listen. From sheep's back to garbage heap, my journey is but an allegory of all existence: born pure, shaped by hands, admired, used, passed on, worn out, and finally abandoned.

If I have learned anything, it is this: dignity does not reside in appearances, but in purpose. I was great not because I once shone in a glass showroom, but because I warmed a labourer, comforted a student, shielded a beggar. My end is ignoble, but my meaning endures.

Shoes

I lie here, among rotten peelings of fruit, broken toys, and the whispering skeletons of plastic bags, discarded like a relic of no meaning. The stench of decay is my final companion, the flies my orchestra, and the rustle of the wind through the refuse heap my requiem. Once I bore the dignity of polish, the glimmer of craftsmanship, and the pride of belonging to a man who walked with intellectual arrogance through the corridors of academia. Now, I am torn at the seams, my leather cracked like the skin of an old man forgotten in the corner of a hospice.

The soles, once firm and assured in their stride, are now riddled with holes through which dust and mud creep in shamelessly. My laces, frayed like worn-out nerves, hang loose, no longer binding, no longer needed. The passers-

by do not see me — or if they do, their eyes glide past with that peculiar indifference reserved for ruins, for things that no longer serve.

I wonder: is this the destiny of all creations? To shine for a while, to be adored, to feel the weight of human journeys, only to be abandoned when utility fades? Around me, everything is transient — the banana peel, the withered bouquet, the broken glass bottle — all once desired, all now forsaken. In this graveyard of forgotten things, I prepare to speak. My story is not merely of leather and stitching, but of life, dignity, pride, and the cruelty of time.

I was not always leather, nor was I always destined to hug the feet of man. Once, I was life itself, stretched across the breathing body of a creature that roamed beneath the vast dome of the sky. Before I became the dead skin of utility, I was the living hide of a cow. Yes, my story begins with a grazing beast — slow, patient, unthinking, yet deeply connected to the soil of Pakistan.

She wandered the pastures of Punjab where mustard flowers swayed like golden torches and the horizon breathed with the rhythm of endless fields. Her hooves pressed into the moist earth after monsoon rains, leaving prints soon erased by the forgiving wind. To the farmer,

she was both servant and wealth: her milk nourished his children, her slow labour carried his burdens, her presence was woven into his very household. Yet, despite her usefulness, she was never more than a beast in the ledger of survival — respected only until she ceased to serve.

I, her skin, felt the warmth of the sun, the sting of mosquitoes, the touch of raindrops sliding down like silver tears. Beneath me throbbed the pulse of life — her heart beating with an ancient calm, her breath rising like a hymn to the Creator. I had thought myself eternal, for each dawn found her grazing again, and each dusk saw her lying upon the dust with a rumbling sigh. But eternity is the most fragile illusion.

Age crept upon her like a slow rust upon iron. Her steps grew heavy, her milk dried like a stream in drought, and the farmer's gaze, once tender, now hardened into calculation. When usefulness ebbs, affection follows — that is the law not only of humans but of all society, which cloaks its cruelty in necessity. One morning, a rope was looped around her neck. She lowed weakly, perhaps sensing the betrayal in the familiar hand that pulled her away. Her eyes — vast, liquid, innocent — reflected a sky she would never graze under again.

The butcher's courtyard smelled of blood and iron. There was no poetry there, only the raw arithmetic of death. Knives gleamed like cold truths, and drains carried away what once was warmth. I, her skin, shivered as the blade cut, as life slipped from flesh to silence. She fell, heavy and final, her body now a carcass — a commodity. The farmer, with pockets heavier, walked away. Love had long since been traded for survival.

And I? I was peeled away like a discarded garment, stretched and raw, no longer warm with life but stiffening in death. My days of shielding life from sun and thorn were gone. Now I was to be an object, stripped of memory, reduced to a material for man's endless craft of consumption.

The tannery awaited me. If the butcher's yard was a theatre of endings, the tannery was a factory of transformations — alchemy in reverse, where life became commodity, and nature surrendered to industry. They salted me first, covering my surface with harsh white crystals that sucked out the last breath of organic warmth. Then I was thrown upon heaps of other skins — goats, cows, buffaloes — all of us once breathing, now rotting together in a grotesque camaraderie. We were comrades in decay, yet competitors for utility.

From heaps, we were dragged into drums of lime. I remember the sting — though nerves were gone, memory lingered, as though the ghost of my former life still screamed within me. My hair, once brushed by winds, dissolved into froth, stripped away so I might be reborn in smoothness. Water churned, chemicals burned, and I was no longer skin but leather-in-the-making.

Day by day, I lost what I had been and became what I was required to be. Man does not merely kill; he reshapes. We were flattened, stretched, coloured, perfumed, until no trace of pasture, sun, or rain remained. My identity as part of a cow, as protector of life, as vessel of nature, was obliterated. I became an abstraction — "material."

In the tannery's stench, where workers toiled knee-deep in poisoned waters, I overheard their coughs, their laments, their talk of meagre wages. They, too, were like us — skinned of dignity, stripped of vitality, churned in the drums of survival. Leather and labour: both were soaked in exploitation.

At night, I would dream — if a strip of leather can dream — of the cow's eyes, of the mustard fields, of freedom under the open sky. But each dawn, I awoke stiffer, more alien to myself, more obedient to the destiny crafted by man.

When at last I was lifted out of the vats, tanned to a deep brown sheen, I hardly recognised myself. I was smooth, resilient, ready to be stitched, polished, paraded. Yet beneath that artificial beauty lay scars invisible — the memory of pasture, the betrayal of the farmer, the cut of the blade, the sting of the lime.

I was no longer life. I was commodity. I was property. I was a future shoe waiting to imprison human feet even as I remained imprisoned by my own past.

From the tannery's foul-smelling womb, I was taken into another universe — one equally brutal, yet cloaked in the illusion of artistry: the shoe factory. If the tannery was a slaughterhouse of memory, the factory was a theatre of construction, where fragments of death were assembled into objects of prestige.

I arrived as sheets of leather, bundled, pressed, and tagged. To the human eye, we were no more than hides: textured, uniform, measured by quality. But within me lingered a faint pulse of my old story, though muffled beneath dyes and polish. A story that no worker cared to hear, for their own lives throbbed with exhaustion, poverty, and routine.

The factory was vast, echoing with the drone of machines and the sharp clink of hammers. Men bent over benches, women stitched with calloused fingers, children darted between aisles carrying bundles too heavy for their frail arms. The air smelt of glue, polish, and sweat — a mingling of chemicals and humanity. Each worker moved with a precision born not of love but necessity. For them, a mis-stitch meant rebuke; a slow hand meant dismissal. They, too, were materials, stitched into the machinery of survival.

The first cut was decisive. The blade traced patterns upon me, carving me into shapes that would soon hug a human's foot. No longer whole, I became fragments: vamp, quarter, tongue, lining. Each piece was part of a future whole, yet in that moment I felt dismembered, as if identity were being redefined by geometry.

The sewing machines hummed like restless insects. Needles pierced me with relentless rhythm, threading me together with waxed cords that tightened like the rules of fate. Upper was joined to lining, tongues to quarters. The worker's hands, steady and indifferent, guided me beneath the needle. Their eyes rarely looked at me — I was not beauty, not story, not even object; I was task.

Then came the sole. Sturdy rubber, thick and odorous, it was cut and shaped to match my frame. I was pressed against it with adhesive that smelt like poison, then hammered until no gap remained between us. Upper and lower, leather and sole — the marriage of parts into identity. In that union, I ceased to be scattered fragments and became a shoe. Not one, but half of a pair, for destiny always works in twos. My twin, made from the same hide, mirrored me in form and fate. Together, we became complete — left and right, complement and contrast, inseparable companions.

Polish followed: brushes caressed us with black shine, burnishing us into elegance. We gleamed like promises, our surfaces reflecting the fluorescent lights of the factory. Yet beneath the gloss, I still carried scars invisible to eyes — the scream of the cow, the smoke of the tannery, the sigh of the worker.

At last, we were boxed. A cardboard coffin, not for death but for display, encased us. Tissue paper enfolded us like ceremonial garments, as if to veil our sordid origins. Numbers and labels marked our identity: size, colour, brand. We were no longer leather or hide, but "product."

Our journey continued by lorry, bouncing across uneven roads of Pakistan. The dust seeped into our box, yet inside

we remained untouched, virginal, like a secret yet to be revealed. Outside, the driver cursed traffic, vendors shouted, children chased after vehicles. Life roared, while we lay silent, waiting.

The showroom was our stage. Unboxed, we stood upon glass shelves under white lights that made us gleam like polished relics. Around us were our brethren: glossy oxfords, rugged boots, delicate sandals, casual loafers. Each pair carried the same hidden story of pasture and tannery, yet in the showroom we were no longer remnants of death but symbols of taste and class.

I stood with my twin, proud in our dark sheen, our stitching tight, our sole firm. Customers came and went, their fingers grazing us, their eyes appraising. We learned quickly that status was a theatre: some admired, some scoffed, some measured us not for comfort but for what we represented — wealth, refinement, modernity.

Here, dignity was borrowed, not earned. We were no longer material but metaphors. Shoes, I realised, are not mere protectors of feet; they are declarations of self. They announce the man before he speaks, they stride into rooms before reputations follow. We were power, condensed into leather.

Among us, hierarchies existed. The patent leather boots, tall and sleek, looked down upon us with aristocratic disdain. The casual sneakers laughed at our formality, calling us relics for professors and bureaucrats. The sandals, worn and practical, muttered about humility and use. Yet in the glittering hierarchy of the showroom, we all sought the same fate: to be chosen. For what is worse than rejection? To remain unsold is to rot, to decay behind glass until clearance sales strip you of dignity.

Then he came — the man who would claim us. A professor, stern in appearance, his spectacles gleaming, his brow furrowed with habitual criticism. He ran his fingers across us, tapped our soles, bent our leather with a clinical disdain. Yet in his eyes, I saw approval masked by indifference. He purchased us, not for comfort but for what we symbolised: dignity, authority, the gleam of respectability upon his stride.

Thus began my life upon human feet. I was lifted from display into possession, from commodity into companion. My destiny as leather, as shoe, as symbol, was fulfilled. Yet as I slipped upon his feet for the first time, I felt the weight not only of his body but of his arrogance, his intellect, his disdain for the world he ruled with words.

And so, with each step upon the tiled corridors of academia, my story deepened. From pasture to foot, from hide to symbol, I had travelled across the spectrum of existence. Yet beneath the polish of my present, I carried the darkness of my past.

The first time I slid upon his feet, I felt the firmness of his step, the weight of intellect compressed into stride. He was a professor of sociology — a man who had dissected society into theories, who reduced human behaviour into frameworks, and who wielded his tongue like a whip. His shoes — we, the chosen pair — were not merely for walking; we were the punctuation marks of his authority.

In lecture halls, we trod upon tiled floors that echoed with his footsteps. Students would stiffen as we entered the room, for the sound of leather soles against stone carried the rhythm of power. He stood at the front, adjusting his spectacles, his lips curling with contempt for ignorance. "You do not think," he would say, "you merely parrot." His words, sharp as nails, wounded the timid hearts of youth. I, beneath him, felt the nervous shuffling of students, the weight of their fear pressing invisibly upon me.

Among colleagues, he was no less severe. In the staff room, where tea cups clattered and muted laughter

occasionally blossomed, he strode with a self-importance that silenced lightness. He mocked their research, dismissed their efforts, rebuked their teaching. He was the kind of man who demanded respect not through kindness but through scorn. We, his shoes, gleamed beneath his trousers, polished weekly by a reluctant servant, carrying him like two silent conspirators in his theatre of superiority.

And yet, beneath all this harshness lay a fragility he never admitted. I knew it, for I bore his weight day after day. His steps, though firm, grew heavier with the years. His stride, once brisk, became laboured. The polish could not hide the cracks appearing at my edges, just as his intellectual brilliance could not mask the exhaustion within his flesh.

Still, he paraded us proudly. At conferences, we shone beneath tables where scholars gathered. At weddings, we tapped on marble floors, outshining the laughter of dancers. He looked down upon others as if we ourselves, the shoes, were symbols of his superiority — markers that distinguished him from the ordinary man who wore cheap sandals or dusty slippers. To him, we were extensions of his ego.

But time is a patient predator. One winter morning, after weeks of persistent headaches, his body betrayed him. A numbness seized his limbs, his proud stride faltered, and he collapsed upon the cold floor. The hospital became his new classroom — white sheets instead of blackboards, nurses instead of students. Paralysis gripped half his body, leaving him a prisoner in the very flesh that once towered with pride.

We were cast aside. Shoes have no place in a sickbed. For months, we lay untouched in a corner of his room, dust gathering upon us like forgotten memories. Visitors came, murmured sympathies, and left. He, the once-dominant professor, now sat mute, his voice thick, his gaze hollow. The man who rebuked the world could no longer lift his own hand. Pride dissolved into silence.

One evening, the servant, a humble man in worn clothes, gathered us. His master, unable to walk, had no use for us now. With casual indifference, as if handling an object stripped of meaning, he carried us away. Thus, from the professor's world of academia, where we were symbols of intellect and arrogance, we entered a different universe altogether — the servant's home.

It was a modest dwelling, walls plastered unevenly, a small courtyard where chickens scratched, and laughter

of children filled the air like bright music. Here, no one cared for polish or prestige. We were not displayed, not admired, not symbols of status. We were simply shoes, worn for protection against dust, water, and work.

The servant wore us on Fridays, sometimes on visits to relatives, occasionally to weddings in the mohalla. His feet were broader, his walk slower, but he wore us with gratitude, not arrogance. For him, we were not prestige but blessing — a second-hand luxury that life seldom afforded him. His wife, gentle and content, washed us when too muddy; his children giggled as they tried us on, stumbling clumsily, imagining themselves professors, kings, or officers. Their joy, unlike the professor's pride, was innocent, radiant.

I began to feel a strange transformation. Once, I had been a throne beneath arrogance. Now, I became a companion of humility. With the professor, I had walked the corridors of intellect but never touched kindness. With the servant, I walked dusty lanes yet felt the warmth of gratitude. Life had stripped me of dignity in one sense, yet gifted me meaning in another.

Years passed. My soles thinned further, my leather cracked beyond repair. The servant continued to use me, not discarding me easily, for in his world nothing was

wasted until utterly ruined. His children grew taller, their laughter matured into responsibility. Slowly, I became less shoe and more relic, carried from work to work, from rainy streets to festive gatherings.

At last, when holes gaped in my soles and my stitches hung loose like tired sinews, I was deemed useless. One morning, with a sigh, the servant carried me to the rubbish heap at the edge of the street. There, among broken pots, torn clothes, and forgotten toys, he left me.

Thus, the cycle had completed itself. From pasture to professor, from arrogance to humility, I had travelled across worlds only to return to dust. Yet in this ending, I felt no bitterness. For in my time with the servant, I had tasted a kind of life the professor never knew — joy without pride, simplicity without scorn.

And so, I lie here now, on the garbage heap, companion of ruin, telling my tale to the indifferent wind.

If the professor's house was a palace of pride, then the servant's home was a cottage of contentment. It was small, yes — two rooms, a courtyard hardly wide enough to stretch the arms — yet within its narrow walls resided an abundance of joy. Here, life was not measured by wealth or reputation, but by the laughter of children, the

aroma of simple meals, the rhythm of daily struggle borne with grace.

When I first entered this home, I was placed beside a mat woven from reeds, my polish dimmed but not unloved. For them, I was treasure — not a symbol of pride as I had been for the professor, but a useful blessing, a second-hand luxury their meagre income could not easily afford. The servant — whose name I later learned was Akram — slipped me on with care each time he stepped beyond his lane for occasions more serious than labour. To the mosque on Fridays, to weddings of cousins, to funerals of neighbours, I accompanied him.

Unlike the professor's stride, Akram's steps were not heavy with arrogance but lightened by humility. His feet were broader, his gait slower, yet in carrying him I felt a curious dignity — the dignity of honest toil, of sincerity unmarred by pretence. Each mark I gathered now was not the scuff of arrogance but the dust of labour, the mud of rain-soaked streets, the pebbles of village paths. These were not scars but imprints of authenticity.

His wife, Safiya, was a gentle woman whose hands bore the cracks of constant work, yet whose face glowed with patience. She would take me up when I grew too muddy, wash me with soap in a bucket, scrub my soles, and place

me under the sun to dry. She never scorned me for my age, never cursed my fading polish. To her, I was a gift, an adornment for her husband. “Look,” she once said to her children, “your father has fine shoes now. He can go to the mosque with dignity.” In her eyes, I was not ruin but respect.

The children — three of them, bright-eyed and restless — loved me in their own mischievous ways. Sometimes they slipped their little feet into me, stumbling across the courtyard, giggling as they pretended to be grown men. “I am a professor!” one would declare, wobbling like a puppet. “No, I am a judge!” cried another, falling as the shoes slipped off. Their laughter echoed through the narrow lanes, a melody that gave my old leather a renewed heartbeat. For them, I was not a discarded object but a plaything, a vessel of imagination.

Evenings were special in this house. After the day’s labour, Akram would return weary yet smiling, sit upon the charpoy, and his children would gather around him. Safiya would bring roti, lentils, and sometimes a little pickle. Their meal, though simple, was eaten with delight. Around them, I rested in a corner, observing. I, who had once stood in the cold lecture halls of a proud professor,

now witnessed the warmth of family where love was the true wealth.

Years passed gently, and I aged with them. My leather cracked deeper, my soles wore thin, my stitching loosened. Yet Akram still wore me when he could, unwilling to cast me off until I could serve no more. I became his companion in rain and in sunshine, on long walks to visit relatives, on joyous nights of weddings when drums and flutes filled the air, on sombre days of funerals when silence weighed heavier than words.

In this home, I learned the true nature of dignity. Not the hollow pride of intellectual arrogance, not the glittering display of status in a showroom, but the quiet respect of a man who values what little he owns, and the love of a family that turns scarcity into sufficiency. The professor, for all his intellect, never understood this. Akram, for all his poverty, lived it daily.

But time spares nothing — neither flesh nor leather. Slowly, holes opened in my soles; water seeped through with every step. My laces frayed beyond tying, my polish dulled into permanent shadow. The children, now older, no longer played with me. Their laughter had shifted into responsibilities — school, errands, helping their mother. I, too, had lost the charm of play.

One morning, after years of faithful service, Akram looked at me with a sigh. He turned me in his hands, pressed my soles, examined my cracks. Then, with reluctant acceptance, he said, "It is time." He placed me gently outside, near the rubbish heap at the street corner. Not tossed, not flung, but placed — as if honouring an old companion whose journey had reached its end.

Here, upon the heap of discarded things, I found myself once more among ruins: broken pots, torn garments, rusted tins. Yet this time, my heart — if leather can hold such a thing — felt no bitterness. I had walked the span of existence: from pasture to professor, from arrogance to humility, from showroom glamour to rubbish decay. Each phase had carved upon me its lessons.

As I lie here now, torn and forgotten, I no longer lament. For I have carried not just feet, but lives: the pride of a scholar, the humility of a worker, the laughter of children, the care of a wife. In my cracks lie stories, in my worn soles the geography of human struggle. I am, at last, nothing more than refuse. Yet in being so, I have completed the circle.

Perhaps this is the destiny of all things — to rise, to fall, to serve, to fade. And if man listens closely, even in the silence of an old shoe, he may hear the echo of his own

mortality: that dignity lies not in polish or pride, but in the footsteps we accompany, and the lives we quietly touch.

Book

I lie among the weary remnants of paper, entombed in a coarse sack whose fabric smells of dust, moth, and forgotten prayers. Around me are others of my kind—pages once luminous with words, now yellowed like autumn leaves resigned to the soil. This sack rests in a dim room adjoining a mosque, where the cadence of the muezzin's call passes through the cracks of the wall like threads of light weaving into our silence. Here we wait, not in disdain, but in solemn expectation of burial, for in this land books do not meet the profane fire nor the careless waste; instead, when our spines are broken and our words bleed into tatters, we are folded gently into the earth alongside those whose breath has stilled. Thus, even in death, we share in sanctity.

I feel the gravity of waiting—an unending pause. The sack is heavy, yet each book within it holds a universe

that once soared. Among us are fragments of Qur'ans, dog-eared volumes of philosophy, catechisms of science, crumbling textbooks, and myself—a book of poetry, obscure and unseen. In this quiet sepulcher, I whisper my tale to the shadows, for words, though unspoken, are eternal wanderers.

The mosque's courtyard carries voices of children learning alphabets, their innocent tones contrasting with our exhausted silence. Occasionally, a mourner enters this chamber to retrieve a book for burial when a body departs for eternity. In those moments, I tremble—not with fear but with the mysterious dignity of mortality. Will I, too, find my resting place beside a stranger, lowered into the soil, my words mingling with the dust that once nourished trees?

I remember the sheen of my youth, the fragrance of ink, the touch of human fingers turning my pages in eagerness. Now, forgotten, I await dissolution. Yet in this twilight of my existence, memory unfolds like a hidden manuscript. Before I was a book, I was not ink upon paper but a sapling in the bosom of a green wilderness. My journey began long before letters kissed my skin—when I swayed beneath the morning dew, cradled by the lullabies of wind and bird.

Thus begins my story: from the hush of this sack, awaiting my grave, my thoughts drift backward—to the forest where I first breathed as wood and leaf.

Before ink etched verses upon my skin, before fingers caressed my leaves, before the sack of silence embraced me, I was a tender pulse of green in the breast of a vast forest. That forest was not merely a place of trees—it was a cathedral without walls, a sanctuary where the hymns of birds mingled with the murmur of streams, and the sky stooped low to kiss the crowns of pines, oaks, and neem. Morning descended there not as an event but as a revelation, its light unraveling across dewdrops like silver threads in a tapestry of emerald.

I sprouted timidly among wild grasses, my stem fragile yet aspiring, my veins drinking from the soil's dark wisdom. The earth was moist with secrets older than memory, and each gust of wind carried with it a parable of time. I was not alone—my brethren rose beside me, a brotherhood of saplings reaching upward with naive eagerness, as though the heavens themselves were within grasp. Beneath us, roots intertwined like whispered promises, binding us in kinship unseen.

The forest was a realm of perpetual drama. Monkeys chattered in the canopies, squirrels darted with the

swiftness of thought, and peacocks unfurled their jeweled tails in fleeting rituals of vanity. At night, the moon poured its milk upon us, softening our silhouettes, while jackals announced their hunger from afar. Yet amid this theatre of creation, I felt an unspoken joy—the ecstasy of being, the innocence of existence unthreatened.

Seasons came and went like pages turned by some invisible reader. The monsoon drenched me in hymns of thunder; I drank until my roots were drunk with abundance. Summer pressed upon me with its furnace, yet the winds consoled me with their sighs. Winter cloaked me in silence, each leaf trembling beneath frosty breath. Slowly, I grew taller, sturdier, my bark thickening into a garment of endurance.

But innocence is never eternal. Into the forest one morning thundered a growl unlike nature's voice—the cough of engines, the metallic snarl of chains. Men entered, armed with saws, axes, and greed. Their eyes were not of reverence but of hunger; they looked upon us not as living kin but as raw matter awaiting dissection. The forest trembled—not from wind, but from the foreknowledge of wounds. Birds fled in a flurry of wings, monkeys screeched in alarm, and the silence of fear descended, heavier than monsoon clouds.

I watched, rooted, as one by one, my elders fell. The giants who had sheltered me—the trees whose branches had cradled nests, whose shadows had been my tutor—groaned as iron teeth bit into them. Their fall was like the fall of empires: sudden, thunderous, irreversible. Dust rose like mourning incense.

Then came my turn. The saw tore into me, its rhythm merciless, its bite unforgiving. My sap bled like tears, yet no hand came to console. When I fell, the earth received me with a thud that echoed through my very soul. I had lived in song; I died in noise.

Men dragged my broken form, along with many others, onto the bed of a truck. There we lay in a heap, stripped of dignity, stacked as carcasses of a forgotten war. The forest receded behind us, its green heart punctured, its silence louder than the engines that devoured its children. I looked upon my brothers beside me—we did not speak, yet each carried the same wound, the same bewilderment.

The journey was long. The road stretched like an uncoiling serpent through villages and fields, past rivers shimmering like wounded mirrors. Above, the sky seemed aloof, unwilling to grieve. Dust coated our bodies, hiding the freshness that once glistened in dew. I felt a strange emptiness; my roots were severed, my identity uprooted.

The songs of birds no longer reached me, nor the whispers of the soil.

We entered the city—a labyrinth of brick and smoke, where chimneys pierced the sky like accusatory fingers. The truck rumbled into the yard of a factory, vast and stern, with walls that seemed indifferent to our suffering. Here, we were no longer trees nor beings of breath; we were timber, raw material, lifeless entities awaiting disassembly.

Men leapt upon us, marking, measuring, cutting. Their hands were efficient but without tenderness. The forest had been our cradle; this factory was to be our crucible. I sensed that my journey had only begun, though its path was drenched in estrangement. From a sapling swaying in moonlight, I had become a log awaiting metamorphosis, my destiny rewritten by the will of men.

Thus ended the chapter of my freedom, and began the ordeal of becoming something other than myself. I had once belonged to the silence of the forest; now I was delivered to the noise of industry. My veins that once carried sap would soon become vessels for ink. My leaves that once kissed the sun would soon carry words.

The story of my transformation had begun.

The factory gates yawned before us like the jaws of some iron beast, swallowing whole the truck that bore our broken bodies. The air itself had a taste — thick with coal dust, acrid fumes, and the metallic tang of machinery grinding without pause. We, once proud children of the forest, lay like prisoners in a courtyard, stripped of leaf and song, waiting for verdict. Around us rose towering chimneys that vomited smoke into the sky as though rewriting clouds in a darker script.

Inside, the sound was relentless — not the harmonious rustle of leaves, but the mechanical cadence of saws, pulleys, vats, and presses. It was as if the world had been reduced to one perpetual heartbeat of industry, a pounding rhythm that drowned every other music. Men moved briskly among the machines — men with soot-stained clothes, weary faces, and eyes that carried both fatigue and necessity. Their hands were calloused from constant labour, their breaths measured to the rhythm of engines.

I, a mere log, was dragged with others to the first station of transformation. Saws, sharper than any predator's fang, sliced us into smaller pieces. Each cut was a scream muffled by noise; each fragment felt like another identity stripped away. I was no longer tree, not even timber — I

was fragments, reduced and dismembered, waiting to be remade.

From there, we were pushed into great steaming vats. Here began the alchemy of dissolution. Boiling water, laced with chemicals whose smell stung the nostrils, devoured us. My body softened, my fibers loosened, my form disintegrated. I, once firm with bark and sap, melted into pulp — a grey soup of anonymous fibers swirling in ceaseless agitation. It was death, yet also gestation.

In that vat, I was no longer solitary. Countless trees dissolved beside me, their fibers mingling with mine until individuality dissolved. We became one collective mass — indistinct, interchangeable, yet potent with new possibility. It was as though all our histories — the songs we had heard, the winds we had endured, the birds that had perched upon us — were stirred into one common broth of memory.

The factory workers called this pulp. But to me, it was purgatory. Suspended between what was lost and what was yet to come, I floated in a state of half-being, half-forgetting.

From the vats, the pulp was spread upon endless moving screens, thin as veils, through which water drained, leaving behind a fragile sheet. Here, for the first time, I sensed the outline of my future — a thin, damp skin of fibers clinging together, trembling like a newborn. Heavy rollers pressed upon me, squeezing out the excess, imprinting upon me the discipline of uniformity. Heat then seared me, drying the moisture until I hardened into the flat whiteness of paper.

It was an agony, but also a rebirth. My veins, once channels of sap, were now invisible threads binding fibers into strength. My body, once vertical and rooted, was now horizontal and pliant, ready to carry worlds of ink.

The men who guided this process were not heartless, though they seemed indifferent. Each had his own burden, his own private grief tucked into the folds of his uniform. One whistled a folk song as he adjusted rollers, perhaps to remind himself of a village far away. Another paused to wipe sweat from his brow, his thoughts wandering to the children who awaited his return. A third coughed harshly, the smoke of chimneys lodged permanently in his lungs.

To them, we were not beings, not even remnants of beings. We were raw material, profit, livelihood. Yet I

could feel their humanity hovering like a faint perfume around their weariness. In some hidden corner of their souls, they too were captives of this factory — not of iron teeth, but of necessity's command.

Day after day, the process continued. Sheets upon sheets were produced — some smooth, some coarse, some destined for schoolbooks, others for ledgers, some for posters, and a few, like me, for books of poetry. Each sheet was stacked in bundles, pressed and tied with cords, awaiting transport.

I remember the day I was lifted from the machine, still warm with drying heat, and stacked carefully with my siblings. We were bound tightly, compressed into a cube of whiteness. As we lay in that bundle, I sensed a strange pride: I was no longer a faceless log or a dissolving pulp. I was paper — blank, silent, yet brimming with potential. Upon me would walk the feet of words, and through me thoughts would outlive their authors.

Yet even in this pride, there lingered sorrow. The forest was gone; the birds' songs were no longer mine. My new life was not chosen but imposed. I was fashioned not to breathe but to bear inscriptions, not to sway but to be stacked, traded, consumed.

The bundles were loaded onto carts, then onto lorries. The city streets received us with chaos — horns blaring, vendors shouting, dust rising like restless spirits. At last we arrived at the great paper market, a labyrinth of shops, warehouses, and human energy. Here, paper was not sacred nor mourned; it was commodity. Buyers examined our bundles as though inspecting cattle — weighing, bargaining, dismissing, selecting.

I was sold, along with many others, to a publishing house. There, my true metamorphosis awaited — from blank silence to bearer of verse.

But I shall not hurry. For the memory of that factory clings to me like smoke. It was there I shed the last traces of treehood; it was there I learned the truth of transformation: that to become something new, one must first endure dissolution.

From the marketplace of anonymity, I was carried into the chambers of a publishing house — a place that was less cathedral and more workshop, yet it possessed its own hushed sanctity. The air was thick with the smell of ink, glue, and dust; a perfume both acrid and intoxicating, for it was here that silence learned to speak, and blankness bloomed into thought.

Bundles of us were placed in a corner, waiting our turn. Around me stretched a panorama of industry — compositors bent over wooden frames, arranging letters like jewellers setting stones; calligraphers hunched with reed pens, their fingers stained with ink that glistened like night. Proofs, drafts, discarded sheets lay scattered on the floor like fallen petals of unseen flowers.

The journey from pulp to poetry began with the hand of the calligrapher. He was an old man, his beard streaked with the frost of years, his back bowed not only by age but by endless hours of leaning over paper. His reed pen dipped into the inkwell as though it were drawing from eternity itself. Each stroke was deliberate, measured, imbued with reverence for beauty. His hands shook with age, yet when they touched paper, the trembling ceased, as if the pen had found its home.

It was he who first drew the words that would one day adorn my body. Verse after verse, line after line, he composed not his own thoughts but the thoughts of another — the poet.

Ah, the poet. Let me speak of him. He was not celebrated, not adorned by garlands, not immortalized in gatherings. Yet in his own mind, he was a sovereign of syllables, a monarch of metaphors. His neighbours perhaps dismissed

him as eccentric; his friends saw him as harmless; yet he walked through life as though crowned with laurels unseen. He recited his couplets to mirrors, awaiting applause that never arrived. When he entered the publishing house, his gait carried a mixture of pride and insecurity, like a child parading in oversized robes.

He brought his manuscript — handwritten in uneven script, with verses crossed and re-crossed, with metaphors straining toward grandeur but collapsing beneath weight. Yet to him, each line was a diamond, each metaphor a thunderbolt. The world, he believed, awaited him. And it was upon us, the mute papers, that he inscribed his hunger for immortality.

From the calligrapher's desk, the words moved to the realm of plate-making. Sheets of zinc were polished, coated, exposed to light, etched with shadows of letters. It was alchemy of another sort: the intangible voice of the poet translated into mechanical grooves. Printers handled these plates with rough affection, setting them into presses that stood like iron beasts, their jaws ready to bite ink and spit words.

I remember the first kiss of ink upon my body. It was dark, fragrant, heavy with promise. The rollers moved across me with rhythmic hunger, pressing letters into my

skin. Line by line, stanza by stanza, the poet's dream descended upon me. His verses became my veins; his metaphors, my flesh. I ceased to be merely paper — I became *voice*.

The printing hall was alive with noise: the clanking of machines, the shouts of men, the shuffle of printed sheets. Workers moved swiftly, carrying stacks from one station to another, while the presses beat like colossal hearts. The air trembled with creation, though it was a creation without reverence — mechanical, routine, yet undeniably miraculous.

Once printed, I was gathered with other sheets into gatherings — folded, aligned, and stacked. Women, with nimble fingers, stitched us into quires, their chatter weaving with the rustle of paper. The sewing was meticulous, binding fragments into coherence. Then came the binder, a stern man with eyes like steel, who pressed us between boards, glued our spines, trimmed our edges. Under his hands, I took final shape — no longer a fragile sheet, no longer a bundle of pages, but a book, complete and whole, clothed in a modest cover of green.

On that cover, in gold letters that pretended at grandeur, was embossed the poet's name — larger than the title of the work itself, as though his own existence outweighed

his verses. Beneath it, the title of his collection: *Whispers of Immortality*. How ironic it felt, for whispers soon fade, and immortality is not claimed by ink alone.

At last, I stood among others of my kin on the publisher's shelf, awaiting the world's gaze. I was proud, yet uneasy. For though I bore words upon my skin, I sensed their hollowness — metaphors that strained too hard, similes that gasped for breath, rhythms that stumbled. I carried the voice of a man desperate to be eternal, yet blind to his own frailty.

But books do not choose their contents. We are vessels, not judges. My duty was not to critique, but to endure, to bear, to survive. And so I waited, as the publisher stacked us in neat piles, each book ready to embark upon its own uncertain journey into the hands of strangers.

Thus ended my gestation, and thus began my life as a book. I had been tree, pulp, paper, and now — poetry. But poetry that carried within it not only beauty, but vanity, not only voice, but echo. I wondered: would I be read, loved, treasured? Or forgotten, sold, discarded? My destiny had stepped out of the hands of men who cut trees, boiled pulp, rolled ink. Now it rested in the hands of men who claimed to love words.

Little did I know that the path ahead would lead me through parlours of pride, heaps of neglect, and dreams of an imaginative girl who would cradle me as though I were prophecy. But for the moment, I gleamed with the fresh scent of ink, my pages crisp, my binding taut, my heart swelling with possibility.

I was born.

My first breath in the world beyond the publishing house came with the creak of a shop door. There, upon a shelf of polished wood, I stood among my brethren, newly minted, our spines gleaming, our pages untouched. Men and women entered, their eyes roaming over us with curiosity or calculation, their hands reaching, rejecting, selecting. It was here that I first met my reader — though to call him that is perhaps a flattery he did not deserve.

He was a man of recent wealth. His garments were tailored but stiff with newness, his shoes polished with the hunger of ambition. A golden watch gleamed upon his wrist, announcing more loudly than his lips the story of his fortune. Yet behind his eyes lurked a restlessness, a thirst to be seen not merely as rich, but as cultured, enlightened, refined. Wealth had given him power, but power alone seemed naked without the ornament of intellect.

It was in pursuit of such ornament that he purchased me. Not only me, but many others — tomes of religion bound in leather, volumes of philosophy gilded with solemnity, textbooks of science whose contents he would never unfold, histories, novels, and dictionaries. He bought us as a man buys jewels for a crown he will never wear — to display, not to use.

I remember the day he carried us home. Servants, not he, bore the weight of our bodies into his drawing-room, a chamber already adorned with chandeliers, velvet drapes, carpets thick as meadows. There, upon a carved wooden shelf, we were arrayed like trophies, our spines facing outward, our voices locked in silence.

The man would often invite guests — merchants, politicians, landowners, men whose speech was loud with wealth. To them he displayed us, drawing their attention to the breadth of his collection. He would gesture toward me, toward volumes of Plato, of Iqbal, of Newton, as though their presence alone testified to his wisdom. Rarely did he open our pages; rarer still did his eyes linger long enough to drink the words. Yet in gatherings, he would pluck one of us from the shelf, open a random page, and declaim a line with feigned familiarity, his tone

swelling with the pride of possession rather than the humility of understanding.

Thus I lived for some years — not as a companion, but as a prop, a silent participant in charades of sophistication. My pages, once fresh with the fragrance of ink, grew stiff with neglect. Dust settled upon my cover, only to be brushed away by a servant's hand, not a reader's. The poet's verses within me remained unread, unheard, untested by the mind for which they longed.

Yet vanity, like fashion, is never faithful. In time, the man's appetite for display shifted. Books, he decided, were common ornaments; anyone with coin could buy them. What distinguished the truly refined, the truly superior, were not words but art. And so his gaze turned from shelves to canvases, from bindings to sculptures.

He began to collect paintings, statues, calligraphic panels. His halls filled with portraits framed in gilt, with landscapes daubed in oils, with abstract forms whose meaning even he did not grasp. To visitors he boasted not of his library, but of his gallery, not of authors but of artists. He walked with pride among canvases, pointing with a connoisseur's air, though his understanding of brushstroke and colour was as shallow as his earlier grasp of verse.

And what of us, the books? We had become redundant, relics of a phase now outgrown. One evening, impatient with clutter, he commanded his servants: *“These volumes take too much space. Remove them. Do with them what you will.”* His words were indifferent, dismissive, as though he were discarding furniture, not thought.

The servants obeyed. We were carried from the grand drawing-room into the open air, bundled without ceremony. Some were sold in heaps to an old bookseller, a man whose stall was wedged between tea shops in a crowded bazaar. There we lay in a mound, our spines cracked, our pages bruised, our dignity stripped. I, once proud to gleam upon a shelf, now lay exposed to dust, flies, and the indifferent gaze of passersby.

Yet in that degradation, there was also a strange democracy. Around me lay volumes of scripture, of philosophy, of science, of fiction — all jumbled, all equal in abandonment. No golden watch dictated our worth here, no chandelier cast flattering light upon us. We were what we were: words upon paper, awaiting any hand that might care enough to listen.

The bazaar was a theatre of its own. Voices rose and fell like waves: vendors hawking spices, cloth, trinkets;

beggars pleading in tired tones; children chasing kites between stalls. The bookseller himself was a figure of contradictions — shrewd in trade, yet secretly reverent toward books. Though he stacked us carelessly, I sensed in his eyes a faint sorrow, as if he wished our fates were kinder. His livelihood depended upon our sale, yet he lingered often upon a page, whispering lines as though sipping water.

Days turned into weeks. Sunlight bleached my cover, rain seeped into my spine. Fingers lifted me only to toss me back, unimpressed. I longed for touch — not of ownership, but of genuine curiosity, of someone who would open me not to impress others but to seek themselves.

It was then that she appeared.

A girl, scarcely more than a flower trembling in the wind, her eyes large with wonder, her hands thin yet delicate. She wore the modest dress of the lower middle class, her hair tied simply, her steps uncertain. Around her clung the fragrance of dreams — fragile, impractical, yet radiant. She lingered before the heap of books as though before a treasure chest.

Her fingers brushed me, hesitated, then returned. She lifted me carefully, as though afraid I might crumble. Her eyes scanned my title — *Whispers of Immortality*. I felt her breath quicken, her heart leap. Perhaps she imagined in those whispers the prophecy of her own yearning — to be seen, to be heard, to be more than the anonymity her circumstances decreed.

With a few coins she purchased me, and thus I passed from the parlour of pretension into the fragile realm of dreams.

Among the disheveled heaps of forgotten knowledge, where books slept like abandoned prophets whose sermons had lost their congregations, I lay in silence. My spine was weary, my pages spotted with the bruises of time. Yet fate, ever whimsical, does not allow even the frailest of voices to die unheard. A hand — soft, slender, uncertain as the first ray of dawn — lifted me from the mountain of neglect. I rose, not by my own worth, but by the hunger of a heart that sought not bread, but visions.

She was a college girl, though to call her such is to describe merely her body's placement in classrooms, not her soul's dwelling. For her mind did not inhabit lecture halls nor bend itself to the discipline of sciences. Instead, she wandered in corridors of fancy, erecting castles upon

clouds, composing dialogues with invisible princes, and exchanging glances with poets whose fame existed only in her reveries.

Her home was modest — the kind where walls breathed sighs of endurance and the floor bore scars of long survival. Yet within her little room, where a cracked mirror reflected more dreams than realities, she placed me with reverence. I was no longer a discarded relic; I was enthroned upon her wooden desk like a sacred oracle whose pages whispered destiny.

By lamplight, she read me — not merely with her eyes but with the full theater of her imagination. The words of my poet, mediocre though they were, became to her ears celestial hymns. Where his rhyme faltered, she supplied the rhythm of her longing; where his metaphors stumbled, she gilded them with the luster of her own illusions. To her, he was no obscure versifier lost in the marketplace of forgotten names — he was a bard anointed by the muses, a seer whose syllables prophesied her own unspoken desires.

Often she would press me to her chest, as though my paper ribs might echo the beating of her heart. At times she read aloud, her trembling voice giving life to verses that had lain dormant, like dry seeds suddenly drenched

in rain. Her eyes, large pools of unrest, shone as though she were not reciting borrowed words, but summoning some invisible suitor fashioned out of ink and starlight.

Her mother, a woman carved by necessity, regarded these rituals with weary disapproval. She measured life in the weight of flour sacks and the clang of utensils, not in the airy currency of dreams. To her, poetry was an extravagance, an indulgence in shadows when the family needed substance. Yet the girl, deaf to admonition, drank from my pages as though from a chalice of secret wine.

Her notebooks, meant for lectures, bore testimony not to arithmetic or history but to her own fledgling verses — trembling lines that leaned upon clichés like children clutching their mother's shawl. They lacked the marrow of true art, yet in her own eyes they were prophecies, luminous seeds that would one day blossom into garlands of fame. She imagined gatherings where her poems would be recited, journals where her name would appear in bold type, strangers whispering in admiration of her genius.

I, the book, knew better. I knew that her words were fragile scaffolding, unsteady and premature, yet I dared not tell her so. For what is a book but a mirror of the reader's heart? In her, I reflected not my author's

mediocrity but her yearning grandeur. Thus she gave me new life, and I in return offered her illusions a body.

Her friends at college found her peculiar. While they labored over examinations, she gazed at the sky through the classroom window, composing invisible odes. They mocked her absent-mindedness, yet she wore their laughter as a crown, believing it the mockery of mortals directed at one destined for immortality.

In solitude, she stitched together crude booklets of her own verses, written in hurried hand, tied with strings as though they were sacred scriptures. She would place them beside me on the desk, whispering to me her belief that one day she too would be published, her words pressed into permanence as mine were. Her eyes would close, and in her imagination she saw the printer's ink like chrism upon her forehead, the binding of pages like the clasp of destiny's hand.

There were evenings when her voice grew weary, when her mother's reprimands rang louder than the music of her fancies. Then she would lean upon me silently, her tears staining my cover like transparent calligraphy. Yet even in sorrow she was not grounded in reality; her tears were rehearsals, the sorrows of a heroine she imagined

herself to be, destined to overcome tribulations before ascending to glory.

And I, though torn, though weary, became her confidant, her co-conspirator in rebellion against the ordinary. She confided in me thoughts she told no one else: her hunger for recognition, her secret envy of other girls with prettier dresses, her wish for a prince who would see in her not poverty, but poetry. In these whispers I was less a book and more a silent shrine where dreams were sacrificed and reborn.

Yet destiny is not governed by dreams. The world of bread does not bow to the kingdom of clouds. Her mother's patience, long worn thin, hardened one day into decision. With the same hands that kneaded dough and scrubbed clothes, she gathered her daughter's "extraneous things" — the scribbled notebooks, the stitched booklets, and I, her beloved companion. Into a sack we were cast, not with hatred but with a practical severity, as one disposes of dry leaves to clear the yard.

I felt her absence like a sudden eclipse. The girl wept, pleaded, argued, but her mother's voice — stern with the authority of survival — silenced her. Dreams were no currency to buy bread, she said; imagination did not mend torn garments. And so I, once the oracle of her soul,

was carried away, not to the fire nor to the gutter, but to the mosque, where torn and tired books awaited their burial in the graveyard beside the bodies of men.

Now I lie in that sack, my pages bruised yet fragrant with the warmth of her touch. I await the spade that will hide me beneath earth, beside a silent corpse. Yet in me still lingers her breath, her scribbles, her whispers, her tears — proof that even in poverty's house, dreams may dwell, fragile yet luminous, like candles that burn even when the wind insists they must die.

Thus I remain — a relic, a confidant, a mirror of illusions — waiting to be interred not only with the dead of flesh but with the dead of dreams.

Chair

I lie here, abandoned, amidst a graveyard of forgotten things. My body, once upright and dignified, now leans awkwardly against a mound of rusted irons and fractured woods. My limbs creak with every reluctant breath of the wind, and my joints—once polished and proud—sag like the weary bones of an old warrior left unburied on the battlefield.

Dust has woven a grey shroud upon my surface, and cobwebs cling to me like mourning veils. Children pass by this junkyard and poke at my crooked arms with sticks, laughing at my deformity, as though mocking a monarch stripped of his crown. I, who once bore the weight of power, the eloquence of speeches, the trembling confessions of men, am now reduced to a carcass of timber and nails.

No passerby pauses to wonder what histories are stitched into my cracks, what secrets are etched into my splinters. To them, I am nothing more than firewood in waiting, a relic undeserving of remembrance. Yet, within my broken ribs resides the memory of forests that sang with rain, of craftsmen whose hands shaped me with reverence, of rooms where authority thundered and compassion whispered.

Here, among rusted tins and shattered glass, I whisper my tale to the silence. For though my form is discarded, my story refuses to rot.

I was once not a chair, nor even a thought of one. I was a tree—tall, imperious, and draped in a garment of emerald leaves—rooted deep within a forest where the monsoon sang its hymns and thunder conducted its orchestra. The rain caressed me as a mother her infant, and the winds braided my branches like a maiden's hair. Birds nested in my arms; their songs were my daily prayers, and their eggs, fragile pearls, lay sheltered beneath my canopy. Squirrels leapt across my limbs as if I were a cathedral, my bark the altar of their tiny ceremonies.

I thought myself immortal, for the forest had no clocks, no calendars, only the endless cycle of dawn and dusk. My roots clutched the dark earth with the arrogance of permanence, and I whispered to the stars that I would stand forever. But eternity is a lie told by youth and believed by fools.

One night, men came. They were not pilgrims but predators, clothed in greed rather than reverence. Their lanterns glowed like the eyes of wolves, and their axes glistened with moonlight as though sharpened upon the very bones of the earth. I felt the first strike upon my trunk as a betrayal—steel kissing flesh with cruel finality. The second blow reverberated through my veins like the tolling of a funeral bell. The forest shuddered with me; birds scattered into the night, their cries echoing like the lament of widows.

I bled resin, thick and fragrant, as though pouring libations for my own requiem. My rings, the diaries of countless seasons, trembled with each assault. I thought of the rain that once anointed me, of the sunlight that once painted me gold, of the children of the forest who danced in my shade. All gone, all betrayed, as steel bit deeper, tearing the covenant between earth and sky.

When I finally fell, I did not fall alone. I dragged silence down with me, crushing the undergrowth that had clung to my feet for decades. My descent was slow, agonised, like an emperor tumbling from his throne, his sceptre slipping from his grasp. The ground shook as I embraced it for the last time, no longer master but corpse. The men shouted in triumph. To them, I was not a life ended but profit begun.

They stripped me mercilessly, hacking my branches into anonymity, until I was but a trunk, naked and humiliated. Birds circled above, searching for their homes in vain; the forest whispered a dirge in rustling leaves. I longed for the rain to wash me back into the soil, but instead I was dragged away—ropes biting into my skin, chains clattering like the laughter of demons.

At dawn, I found myself among others—fallen giants like me—stacked upon ox-carts that groaned under our weight. We, who once stood proud as kings, were now prisoners shackled together, bound for exile. The road was cruel and dusty; each jolt of the cart was a further insult to my dignity. Villagers lined the path, some indifferent, others curious, children pointing at our fallen grandeur as though at caged animals. I wondered if they

knew we had once been their guardians, breathing life into the very air they swallowed.

We were delivered to a timber yard, that purgatory of forgotten forests. There we were arranged in lifeless symmetry, logs upon logs, stripped of identity and reduced to merchandise. The sun scorched my skin by day, and the night air chilled me into numbness. Men came with ink and chalk, marking us with numbers, as though cataloguing the condemned. I heard whispers among the logs: some hoped to be firewood, their torment brief; others dreamed of palaces and temples, their sacrifice immortalised in splendour. I did not know what destiny awaited me, but I felt a foreboding shadow stretching across my grain.

Days blurred into weeks. My bark hardened, my sap dried, and I lost the scent of rain forever. Then one morning, footsteps heavier than usual approached. A man, bearded and weary, inspected us with the gaze of one who measured value, not life. His fingers tapped my surface, listening to my resonance, as though my heartbeats still lingered. He nodded and spoke in the bargaining tongue of markets. Soon I was purchased, my fate sealed with coins exchanged like thirty pieces of silver for a betrayed friend.

The carpenter's yard became my new prison. Here, the air was perfumed with sawdust, the cries of tortured timbers mingling with the rasp of blades. I lay among planks, beams, and splinters—the broken fragments of once-living trees. Some whispered of reincarnation: "We shall be doors, windows, cradles, beds. Better to serve humanity in silence than rot unremembered." Others cursed our captors, longing only for the flames of release.

I was silent, for within me smouldered a bitterness too profound for words. I had been cut from the forest not by storm nor by age but by greed. And yet, despite my resentment, I could not escape the inevitability of transformation. The carpenter eyed me with the vision of a sculptor glimpsing marble; I was not wood to him, but potential—something waiting to be shaped, nailed, cushioned, and sold.

At night, when the yard slept, I dreamed of my forest. I saw again the monsoon painting my leaves silver, the sparrows weaving lullabies into my branches, the earth cradling my roots in warmth. I awoke each dawn to the rasp of saws, that brutal symphony announcing my erasure. Piece by piece, they would take me apart, until no trace of the forest remained.

Thus began the slow unravelling of my first identity. I was no longer tree, no longer shelter, no longer cathedral of birdsong. I was timber, commodity, a thing to be traded, bartered, fashioned into utility. The forest had been my soul; now I was stripped bare, awaiting rebirth in alien hands.

And so, from the rain-drenched bosom of the earth to the dusty yard of the carpenter, I came—an exile from eternity, a fallen monarch preparing to be recast in servitude.

The day of my dismemberment dawned with the metallic cough of saws. A shaft of morning light pierced the carpenter's shed, glinting upon the serrated mouths of blades arranged like an arsenal of executioners. I, who once stood in forested grandeur, was dragged upon a bench—my trunk raw, stripped, awaiting incision.

The carpenter, a man of skill yet devoid of sentiment, studied me with the same gaze a surgeon reserves for the flesh of the anaesthetised. In his calloused hands, the saw was no mere tool; it was a verdict. Its teeth sank into me, and my fibres screamed silently. Each pull tore apart centuries of memory—rings carved by rain, drought, storm, and sunlight. I was shredded into planks, my unity

fractured, my dignity scattered like the limbs of a saint divided into relics.

Around me rose a choir of sawdust, golden particles suspended in shafts of light like angels unwilling to descend. They danced briefly before settling on the ground—ashes of my former self. The carpenter coughed, unaware he breathed fragments of my history.

Next came the chisels—sharp tongues of iron that gnawed and sculpted. They pared my edges, smoothing my defiance into conformity. Each strike of the mallet resounded like the knell of fate, rhythmically stripping me of individuality. My bark, once my armour, was cast aside, revealing pale flesh beneath, vulnerable and raw. I felt exposed, as if my soul were being carved open for dissection.

Soon I was separated into parts, each destined for its role: legs, arms, backrest, seat. It was as though a divine decree had divided me into functions, reducing my wholeness into hierarchy. Once, I had been a singular tree, standing sovereign; now I was a collection of duties, awaiting assembly like soldiers drilled into obedience.

The carpenter's bench became my crucible. Holes were bored into me, my body punctured to accommodate pegs

and nails. I flinched, though silently, as steel entered my grain. Nails, those cold parasites, lodged themselves permanently, fastening my pieces together not with affection but with coercion. My joints were bound with glue—sticky, suffocating bonds that reminded me of shackles upon a prisoner's wrists.

Gradually, I assumed shape. The carpenter stepped back to regard me, and I saw in his eyes a glimmer of pride. To him, I was becoming furniture; to me, I was becoming estranged from myself. My legs, carved and polished, stood obediently. My arms curved like those of a weary supplicant. My back rose high, a throne in miniature, yet I felt no triumph. Transformation is not always rebirth; sometimes it is exile.

After the hammering came the smoothing. Sandpaper rasped across my skin with merciless tenderness. Its friction was both torment and salvation, tearing away splinters, refining me into elegance. My surface glowed under the punishment, yet beneath the sheen lay bruises invisible to human eyes. I wondered if this was beauty: a suffering so complete that it left no trace but polish.

The carpenter's brush dipped into varnish, and soon I was anointed with a dark, glossy coat. It seeped into my pores, sealing my fibres as though embalming me for

eternity. I glistened under the oil, radiant like a saint gilded for procession, though inside I felt embalmed, my breath suffocated beneath layers of artifice. My scent changed too—from earthy resin to chemical polish—until I no longer recognised myself.

Then came the cushioning. A square of fabric was stretched across my seat, stuffed with softness I had never known. To others it would be comfort; to me it was disguise. The carpenter's needle stitched the fabric tightly, imprisoning me beneath a smiling mask. I thought of the birds that once rested on my boughs, feathered and alive. Now men would rest upon me, heavy with authority, their words sharper than the axe that felled me.

When the final nail was driven and the last coat dried, I stood complete: a chair, stately and dignified. The carpenter dusted his hands as though dismissing me from birth. He placed me among other creations—tables, beds, cabinets—each a fellow exile dressed in utility. We gazed at one another like strangers at a masquerade, all of us robbed of origin, draped in polish, awaiting our assignation.

Days passed in the carpenter's workshop. Customers came and went, their hands fondling my varnished arms, their eyes measuring my stature. Some dismissed me as

too stern, others as too costly. I listened, though I could not plead. At last, I was chosen—not by a common man but by a merchant who recognised my solemn elegance. He purchased me, along with a set of polished companions, and I was transported to a showroom—an arena where furniture stood like statues in a museum, admired but unspeaking.

In that showroom, under electric lights and the perfumed air of commerce, I felt an alien pride. I was arranged in a row of chairs, yet I towered with a certain dignity. Customers whispered of my craftsmanship, my polish, my endurance. They sat upon me briefly, testing my strength, never realising I bore the patience of centuries within my grain. I became a specimen of desire, an object that stirred admiration and envy.

But pride is fragile. I could not forget the forest, nor the axe, nor the silent screams of my brethren. Beneath my gloss lingered the ghost of rain-soaked leaves, the memory of roots entwined with earth. I stood tall, yes, but like a soldier wearing medals won in wars he despised.

And yet, my destiny had only begun to unfold. For one day, amidst murmurs of politicians and merchants, a man entered the showroom whose gaze was not of curiosity but command. His suit was crisp, his voice steeled with

authority, his presence one of power cloaked in charisma. He surveyed the array, but his eyes settled upon me.

“Perfect,” he declared.

Thus was I purchased by a minister, to serve not merely as furniture but as throne to his ambition. My journey from rain-drenched forest to varnished showroom had concluded; another, more perilous chapter was about to begin.

When I first entered the minister’s office, I felt myself crowned. The room was vast, panelled with mahogany, its air heavy with the musk of authority. On the wall behind the desk hung portraits of statesmen glaring with frozen dignity. The carpet beneath my legs was thick, muffling the footsteps of those who entered as though they approached a shrine. And in the centre of this sanctum, I stood—gleaming, upright, prepared to bear the weight of governance.

The minister sank into me with the entitlement of a monarch reclaiming his throne. His body moulded into my cushion, and with each gesture of his hand, I felt the tremors of command ripple through my frame. Here was a man of wit, his tongue sharpened like a rapier. He dissected opponents with sarcasm, rebuked officers with

thunder, and flayed subordinates with contempt. Words that issued from his mouth fell like hammers, and I, beneath him, absorbed their echo in silence.

At first, I mistook his eloquence for brilliance, his authority for wisdom. But as days turned into months, I began to perceive the rot beneath the polish. He was cunning rather than wise, theatrical rather than just. His speeches in assembly, rehearsed upon me the night before, dripped with venom disguised as rhetoric. He mocked opposition leaders as clowns, branded dissenters as traitors, and humiliated officers until they shrank like chastised schoolboys. Each insult that poured from his lips weighed upon me, as though my wooden ribs were taxed with bearing not only his body but his arrogance.

The office became a theatre of cruelty. Civil servants entered, trembling, their files clutched like shields. They sat before the minister, only to be dismissed as incompetents, their voices drowned in his monologues. I, stationed beneath his frame, could sense the quiver of their legs, the sweat on their palms. More than once I wished to splinter beneath him, to let him crash upon the floor and taste humility. Yet wood does not choose; it endures.

Power intoxicates like strong wine, and he drank deep. Ministers from other departments visited, each performance staged with grandeur. I became not just a chair but a pedestal of vanity. Cameras occasionally flashed, capturing him seated upon me, and my polished frame gleamed in newspapers—uncredited, unnoticed, yet present in history's footnotes. If men are remembered for their thrones, what of the thrones themselves?

But power, like polish, fades. One morning the air shifted; the office, usually humming with sycophants, grew tense with whispers. Rumours drifted in—parliament dissolved, cabinet dismissed, authority evaporated. The minister entered, not as a conqueror but as a man cornered. His steps were heavy, his shoulders bent. He slumped into me, no longer a monarch but a prisoner of his own downfall. His fingers drummed upon my arms nervously, as though seeking reassurance from wood when flesh had betrayed him.

In days, the office was emptied. Files vanished, portraits removed, carpets rolled. Men who once bowed before him now avoided his gaze. When the final hour arrived, he left without ceremony. I remained, silent, abandoned in the stripped chamber. For a brief moment, I felt liberation, as though I too had been dismissed from tyranny's service.

But I was not to languish long. An officer of police, appointed custodian of the office's remnants, came to collect me. Unlike the minister, he did not regard me with pride but with pragmatic eyes. To him, I was not a throne but a seat—useful, serviceable, sturdy. Thus began a new chapter, far gentler than the last.

I was carried into his home, a modest dwelling where the scent of cooking lent warmth no varnish could imitate. Children scampered about, their laughter fluttering like sparrows. The officer placed me in his study, where shelves groaned beneath books rather than decrees. Here, my role shifted from pedestal of arrogance to companion of integrity.

The police officer was a man of principle. His uniform, neatly pressed, was not armour for vanity but a garment of duty. When he sat upon me, his weight carried not the burden of pride but the calm of responsibility. His voice, though firm, was never cruel. He rebuked with fairness, advised with patience, and spoke to his children with tenderness. I, accustomed to venomous tirades, found his words like spring water—clear, measured, nourishing.

Evenings in his home were symphonies of civility. His children gathered at his knee, reciting lessons, asking questions, sharing stories. His wife, graceful in her quiet

strength, moved about with kindness woven into every gesture. In their company, I discovered an apex of existence: to serve not as symbol of domination but as witness to harmony. My polish no longer gleamed under political light, yet in the glow of a simple lamp, I felt luminous.

Often he sat upon me reading scripture, his fingers tracing verses with reverence. At times he penned notes for cases, his brow furrowed not in malice but in contemplation of justice. I bore him gladly, for in his service my fibres resonated with dignity. Unlike the minister, who used me to belittle others, the officer used me to elevate truth.

I watched his children grow in respectfulness, rising when elders entered, speaking with humility, offering help with cheerful alacrity. Their manners were not rehearsed performances but the natural bloom of a household watered with virtue. In their laughter, I heard echoes of the forest birds; in their reverence, I felt roots entwining me once more with the earth.

This, truly, was the summit of my existence: not in the echoing halls of politics but in the quiet chamber of a righteous man. I had become not throne but companion, not stage for vanity but support for integrity. If trees

could choose their afterlives, I thought, they would pray to become such instruments of goodness.

But time, relentless sculptor, spares no form. Years pressed upon my frame; joints loosened, polish dulled, fabric tore. Children who once clambered upon me with playful squeals grew tall, their games abandoned. The officer, now greying, looked upon me with affection tinged with sorrow. He patted my arm as one pats an old comrade, whispering gratitude to the inanimate.

At last, the inevitable came: my body, fractured and weary, could no longer serve. With a heavy sigh, the officer ordered me carried away, not with contempt but with reluctant mercy. Thus I found myself once more among rust and rubble, my tale circling back to dust. Yet within my splinters, I carried the memory of dignity—the paradox of having lived both as throne of arrogance and seat of virtue.

If my years in the minister's office were spent suffocating beneath the fumes of vanity, then my years in the home of the police officer were like inhaling pure mountain air after a storm. The moment I entered his dwelling, I knew I had crossed into a different climate of existence. There were no red carpets to suffocate my feet, no portraits of self-glorification on the walls, no courtiers tiptoeing in

fear. Instead, I was greeted by the fragrance of home-cooked food, the murmur of gentle voices, and the echo of children's laughter—notes of a symphony more harmonious than any anthem of state.

The officer's house was modest but alive with dignity. Its walls bore not the arrogance of wealth but the humility of scholarship; books lined the shelves, their spines worn from use, their margins scribbled with thought. In one corner lay prayer mats, folded neatly, their fibres fragrant with the musk of devotion. In the courtyard bloomed flowers tended by loving hands, their colours more radiant to me than the polished brass of any government office.

I was placed in his study, a room that became my sanctuary. There, amid the fragrance of ink and paper, I found my true vocation. The officer would sit upon me each morning as he prepared his reports, his pen scratching across files with steady resolve. Unlike the minister, who poured poison into words, this man distilled justice. His hands trembled not with greed but with responsibility, and I bore his weight with joy, as though carrying a noble pilgrim on a sacred journey.

Evenings brought a different rhythm. After returning from duty, he would sink into me with a sigh of weariness

softened by contentment. His children would rush to him, clambering onto his lap, their voices tumbling over one another in excitement. “Father, I learned a new verse today!” cried one. “Father, I helped Mother in the kitchen!” declared another. I felt the warmth of their little bodies pressing against mine, and I remembered the sparrows that once nested in my branches. Once more, I was sanctuary.

The officer never raised his voice in cruelty. When he corrected his children, it was with the firmness of a compass pointing north, never the whip of tyranny. His wife, graceful as a verse of poetry, often brought him tea, her face glowing not with submission but with partnership. They conversed as equals, their voices weaving a fabric of respect so fine it could clothe an entire civilisation.

I bore witness to family conversations that were symphonies of civility. The children recited their lessons, stumbling over words, and their father corrected them gently, never with scorn. Sometimes he read aloud from books—histories, scriptures, poetry—and I vibrated with the cadence of his voice. His words carried weight, but

never the crushing kind; they uplifted, as though lifting the very rafters of the house with their light.

On nights of electricity outages, when the city outside groaned in darkness, the family lit a lantern. Its glow spread across the room, throwing long shadows upon the walls. I loved those evenings most. The officer would sit upon me, his children gathered around like disciples around a sage, and he would tell them stories—of prophets and kings, of battles fought not for power but for truth, of men and women who stood steadfast against tyranny. I felt my wooden arms tremble with quiet pride, for in those moments I was more than furniture; I was a pulpit of wisdom, a vessel bearing the weight of human nobility.

Unlike the minister, who used me as a weapon of intimidation, this man used me as an instrument of grace. I felt his heartbeat through my planks, and it resonated with calm integrity. There were no sycophants here, no trembling officers, no hollow speeches. There was only humanity—unpretentious, radiant, whole.

The children grew in that atmosphere of reverence. I watched them learn to rise when their father entered, not out of fear but respect. I saw them bow to their mother with affection, treat their neighbours with kindness, and

even offer water to beggars who passed by the gate. Their manners were not rehearsed; they blossomed naturally, like flowers opening at dawn. And I, a mere chair, felt myself part of their moral education, for I had borne witness to their father's example.

Many times, I wished the forest could see me now. Though I had been torn from its bosom, though I had suffered under the arrogance of politics, here I had found redemption. My wood, once cut in violence, now served peace. My form, once polished for vanity, now supported virtue. If the rain that once kissed my leaves could have looked upon me, it would not have wept but smiled.

Years passed in this rhythm of serenity. My polish grew dull, my joints creaked faintly, yet the family never cast me aside. The officer's hand, aged and lined with service, often rested on my arm as he read, as though I were an old comrade sharing his burdens. His children, now grown into courteous young men and women, still touched me with familiarity, for I was woven into their childhood memories. Even when newer, shinier chairs entered the house, they were treated as guests; I remained the elder, worn yet honoured.

This was the apex of my existence. Not the forest, where I had been proud but naïve. Not the minister's office, where

I had been polished but hollow. Here, in this modest home, I discovered the true meaning of being: to serve quietly, to witness goodness, to support virtue. I was no longer an exile from the forest; I was a participant in the making of civilisation.

If I could have spoken aloud, I would have told them: *You have given me back my dignity, greater than any throne could offer.* But chairs do not speak. They endure. And in my silent endurance, I tasted fulfilment sweeter than the rains of my youth.

And so, here I lie—forgotten amidst the rusted skeletons of machines and the fractured carcasses of other castaway things. My joints creak no longer with the weight of dignitaries, nor do children's laughter ripple through my frame. Instead, silence has become my final master, broken only by the occasional cry of a crow or the metallic clang of scavengers rummaging through this graveyard of the unwanted.

My legs, once steady as pillars, are now splintered and uneven. My polish has long been stripped by the claws of time, leaving my wood naked, grey, and scarred, like the weary back of a labourer. The cushion that once cradled a minister's arrogance and a father's tenderness is torn, its stuffing leaking like forgotten secrets. No passer-by sees

in me anything but waste—timber for the fire, junk for the heap.

Yet within these broken ribs, my story endures. I remember the forest rains, the axe that betrayed my roots, the carpenter's faithful hands, the minister's hollow speeches, and the officer's luminous home. I have borne tyranny and tenderness alike; I have been throne and sanctuary. And though my body is ruined, my essence remains—a witness to the follies and graces of humankind.

Discarded, yes. But not erased. For what is a chair, if not a silent chronicler of lives lived upon it? Though I return now to dust, I take with me the memory of power's vanity and virtue's quiet strength.

If a scrap of me should burn in some poor man's fire, let the smoke carry my tale into the sky, as testament that even the humblest of objects can embody the grandeur and decay of humanity.

Thus ends my story—not with glory, nor with despair, but with the dignity of having endured.